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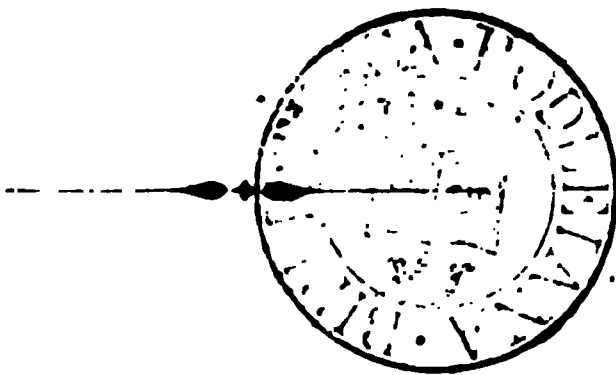
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THE VICTORY OF THE VANQUISHED. A Tale of the First Century. [Just Out.]

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THE VANQUISHED:

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BY THE AUTHOR OF
"CHRONICLES OF THE SCHÖNBERG-COTTA FAMILY," ETC.



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THE
VICTORY OF THE VANQUISHED.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the eve of the Triumph of Germanicus. The Roman camp on the hills above the Campagna was hushed in sleep. A tall fair woman—one of the German captives who were to grace the triumph—had crept to the door of one of the tents, and was gazing with her eyes dreamily fixed on the long reach of Roman Road which stretched before her into the darkness.

To her, as to us, that road was a great symbol. It was no mere pliant highway of commerce, in gracious windings accommodating itself to the needs of men and the difficulties of nature. Rigid as the Roman rule, it scaled the hills and spanned the valleys: the crooked must be made straight before it, and the rough places plain. No kindly chain, gently binding nation to nation with friendly links; but a weapon of war, straight

as the spear of the soldier, as the rod of the lictor, as the flight of an arrow, it shot over mountain and chasm, through forest and marsh—not to link the nations to each other, but to bind the ends of the earth to Rome. To the Roman, a ray of light from the great focus of the Empire; to the German captive, a transverse strand of the great mystic web in which tribe after tribe of her race had been entangled and crushed

Far back into her inner life those arrowy lines led her: mystic Runes bringing up shadowy forms from the icy hollows or fiery abysses of the past—bringing down royal shapes from its sunny heights. Far back to a hut on the edge of a Northern forest; one of those huge, impenetrable forests which gave mystery and poetry to the prosaic levels of her North German land; the great Teutoberger Forest between the rivers Lippe and Weser.

Murmurs of waters and of pines had mingled with her mother's cradle-songs. For she, too, sitting there so solitary, so helpless, had been welcomed into the world as if it were to be a joyous home to her—as if it were the abiding-place, the city of the shining palaces where dwelt the Æsir, the mighty gods. She, too, had once been a jewel and a treasure, cherished and guarded as if she were worth it: in that earliest home, and then in another.

The last was too near to bear looking at yet. Her thoughts went back to the first. Brothers and sisters, growing up in one home: their training, the necessity of labour and the example of brave and pure lives; their

play, wild feats of daring, wrestling, climbing gigantic forest-trees, scaling all but inaccessible rocks, leaping streams or breasting them at flood, the mimicry of the labour of the men and women they were to follow—of the huntsman, the boatman, and the smith.

The soldier's was no distinctive calling then. All the men had to fight—all free men ; and free women too, if needed. The wolves and the neighbouring Slaves had no respect for sex or age : and if the hand of maid and mother could not grasp the spear as well as the shepherd's staff and the reaper's hook, what would become of the homes, and the harvests, and the little ones, when the men were away at the war or the chase, and the growl of the hungry bear was heard across the snow, or the form of some treacherous foe was seen lurking behind the pine-stems ? The German women had need to be strong, and brave, and true—well-nigh as strong and altogether as brave as the men—if the race was to fight its way through the centuries, and Europe was to be,

As Siguna, the German captive, sat at the tent door in the dusk, dreamily following the white line of paved way—whose sharp outline, defined against the dark borders of wood or herbage, was the only thing yet clearly visible—until it was lost in the darkness, her thoughts also lost themselves with it in a deeper darkness, and became more and more dim and sombre. Once, indeed, there had been need that she should be strong, and brave, and true : a free woman of noble

birth ; the wife of a brave free man, honoured among his tribe for his skill and strength in forging weapons and wielding them, in wielding the smith's hammer and the warrior's spear ; the mother of boys and maidens who were to bear on the good name and build up the house and the tribe.

But now what use was there for strength, or courage, or faith—in her, a captive slave ? Her husband, they said, had fallen in the battle which the General Cæcina had won over the hero Herman in the Teutoberger Wald : her sons with him—all save the youngest, who now lay sleeping, a captive in the tent. She herself, her young son Siward, and her little daughter Hilda, had been betrayed by the chief Segestes into the hands of the Romans at the same time with Thusnelda, bride of the hero Herman, and the daughter of the traitor. Her strength would only make her a more useful slave to the conquerors ; her courage availed nothing to defend herself or her children ; and what were truth and honour to one who henceforth was a chattel, with no recognized relationships, no rights, no hopes ? Would it not be well for her to do what Varus, the hapless Roman general, had so lately done, when his entangled legions lay at the mercy of the young hero Herman ? He fell, despairing, on his own sword ; and fled thus, not from one of his enemies, but from all, for ever.

“Fled !” yes, *fled*. Such an end she felt would be *flight*, not rashly to be chosen by a German freewoman.

Who could say whether, in that dim under-world also, there might not be a second burial for the souls of cowards who thus deserted their post ; as cowards among her people were suffocated and buried in mud ?

Moreover, as she gazed into the darkness, a strong persuasion came over her—not for the first time, but each time gathering strength—that Olave, her husband, was not slain, that he still survived, and that she was bound to live for him and for his children. A strange irresistible presentiment and persuasion, such as she had been wont to feel from her youth, such as haunts an imaginative race like hers—a presentiment held sacred in those days among her people, as a divine instinct or inspiration, which was one of the spiritual prerogatives of brave and pure women.

This time it was quickened and reinforced by a touch which awoke instincts at least as sacred.

Her son Siward had crept to her side at the tent door, noiselessly, and pressing her hand against his cheek, he drew it around him. A boy of sixteen, hardy and daring, as boys of his race were wont to be ; had he been at home and free, the men of his tribe would ere this have gathered together and endued him with the sword and buckler, wherewith to prove and betoken his manhood. But for nearly two years he had been a captive in the Roman camp, the camp of Germanicus. His mother had been in the household of Agrippina, and he himself the play-fellow of the child Caligula, darling of the veterans

—shod, to please them, in his toy caligas, copies of their rough military shoes. For Siward was gentle, as the courageous are wont to be, and children trusted him. And the Emperor Caligula was once a child ;—what he was to become, unknown to his play-fellows the veterans, or to himself.

“Mother,” the boy whispered, pouring out in a swift torrent the thoughts and purposes that had been slowly gathering within him, “you cannot sleep. Nor can I. You are thinking of to-morrow ; of the Roman triumph, and of our shame. But do not heed the triumph. I heed it not. We were not conquered by the Romans ; we neither fled, nor were taken in fair fight, but were betrayed by our own people. Traitors alike, those who bought and sold us. The shame is theirs, not ours. And, mother, I have been thinking it matters little whether they call me slave or free. If I choose to serve, I serve freely. And I do choose to serve ; for by serving the Romans we may learn to conquer them, as our Herman did. And of all Romans I choose to serve Germanicus and Agrippina. For she is brave and true, and he is brave and generous, save in the matter of buying us of the traitor. Mother,” he entreated, “do not heed the triumph. I have heard some say, it is no triumph to Germanicus. He had rather far have been winning victories in Germany, than dragging captives after him at Rome, leaving our people to undo his victories. Think not of the chains and jeers of these Romans.

Think of us, your children, who will never dishonour our father nor thee. Think of us, and walk, not as a captive, but as a crowned queen. For I have set my heart to be patient, and to learn as Herman did, of these Romans, until one day, if it may be, I may help to conquer freedom back, for us and for our race."

She looked proudly on his fair open brow, and then answered in a low, murmuring voice,—

"You will never dishonour me, nor will I ever desert you. But I was thinking not of the morrow, nor of any morrows. The morrows are for you, not for me; unless, indeed, the inward voice speak true, and he lives, your father yet lives!"

Her voice trembled, and the boy did not interrupt her by a question.

"Remember, my son, I have this voice within me, dim and low, yet mightier than all men can say to the contrary. Remember—but speak not of it unless I tell you. Live you as if he were slain, and you alone bore his name. I live as if he lived."

Then pointing to the reach of road, she continued, "I was not thinking of to-morrow, but of yesterdays long past; tracing back that fatal road to its beginning far away in the Teutoberger Forest, far away in the days that are gone. Listen, my son, and remember. For the day is beginning to dawn, and who knows how often we may be alone together thus, and free to speak?"

"We lived at the edge of the Forest. In my childhood

we knew no foes but the bears and wolves which haunted it, and some stray bands of Slaves, wandering from their lands beyond the Elbe, the hordes which ever press our people onward unless we stem their ceaseless torrents back, or capture them and make them slaves."

"The Slaves were our slaves. Now we are to be slaves of the Romans," said the boy. "I can understand now why our slaves hated us, and were not to be trusted."

"Slaves there must be of necessity," Siguna replied; "for men are not of one blood, nor one destiny, any more than trees. How could the free do the noble work, unless there were slaves to do the base? The wrong is that we Germans, who were born to be free, should be ensnared and enslaved, instead of those wild savage hordes who can speak no language fit for freemen, and were born to serve. My brothers and sisters," she continued, "had left the father's house. They had married, and had houses and slaves of their own. I was left alone with my father and mother, he a gray-haired man. We knew no foes save the wild beasts and the wild men; until one summer morning I heard my father's voice, grown tremulous and feeble now, in tones more tremulous than usual, as he came in from his work. 'Hilda, mother,' he said, 'and Siguna, daughter: our days in the land of our fathers are numbered. The Southern men are on us, the men of Rome. My bones will be the last laid among

the dead of our race. You will bury me, and then go hence to be free.' We thought he must have seen an army, and listened hour after hour to hear the tread of armed men; but when, later in the day, we followed him to the brow of a neighbouring hill, we could see nothing along the marshes and far undulations of the heath but an orderly band of workmen, digging trenches, which others were carefully filling up with stones.

"It seemed a harmless, peaceable employment; but my father said,—

"It is the end of the chain of the giants. The other end is in the hands of the man who rules all men, save a few of us Germans.

"Between us and the dwelling of the gods is the Rainbow Bridge, whereon the gods and heroes come to and fro.

"This is the bridge between us and the dwelling of the destroyers. Thereon henceforth for ever those who hate us will pass to and fro, until they drive us from our homes. Where that straight way comes, the Roman rules; and the Teuton must fly or become a slave, moulded into the likeness of the stranger, speaking his Roman tongue, and wearing his garb.'

"But Olave the brave, your father, my betrothed from childhood, son of the smith (whose arm could wield the hammer like a god, and the spear like a hero, although he was but a boy), saw hope where the aged saw only fear, and he said afterwards, secretly, to me,—

“A bridge for one is a bridge for another. Whence the Southern men came, thither the Northern men can go. At the other end of the chain is the golden city, glorious as Asgard, the city of the gods. We will make that road as the Rainbow Bridge, and we will be the heroes who shall tread it to storm the golden city, and make it ours and yours.’

“And I, too, being young, believed the voice of youth, and thought hope the true light that shall endure, and fear the mere twilight shadow, born of the darkness which is nothing, and vanishing into the nothingness whence it came.

“So from day to day we watched the strangers at their work. And we could not but wonder at their skill. The ground was in many parts soft and marshy, such as the lightest-footed maiden could scarcely cross in safety. But these strangers had determined to make it solid and strong enough to bear the weight of military waggons, laden baggage mules, and the tread of heavily-armed legions. And they did it. First, they dug the two trenches straight as an arrow, to mark out the road; then the deep ditch between. Meantime other labourers had been felling trees in the forest; piles were cut of the strongest wood, and sunk deep into the marshy ground. These were covered with a thick layer of small stones and shingle;—some of it gathered from the river bed, others broken fragments of the stones they were shaping and cutting for the surface. For each man had

his given work. There was no debating or hesitating among them. Layer on layer lay the stones, and layer on layer worked the men. The wood-cutter did not interfere with the stone-cutter, or the stone-cutter with the brick-layer, any more than the piles with the stones, or the stones with the layer of rubble-work (the crumbled stone cemented with lime which lay above it), or that with the layer of broken pottery and brick-work above again. Young as I then was, I remember how the sense of Law and Order, and the silent, continuous work, among them, contrasted with our divisions and debates, our eager talking over work, and fitful intervals of work and lazy revelling, fell on me with a crushing sense of power.

“The very broken fragments of pottery, which lay as unsightly encumbrances before our huts, were treasures in those magical hands.

“And at last came the smooth stones from the quarries they made in the hills, carefully shaped and levelled, and laid on the surface, rammed down and cemented and fitted, so that the whole was one unbroken building, smooth and solid, and strong enough, I thought, for the walls of Asgard. And over it passed the armed bands, man and horse, the heavy waggons, and the laden mules. They had made a way through the marsh as solid as the everlasting hills. What might they not do? Why not make a way through the air or the sea?

“Wood from our forests, shingle from our rivers,

potsherds from our rubbish heaps, rock from our hills, they had gathered all into one mighty weapon for our ruin.

“One evening after this, there was a gathering of men from many tribes in our home, to debate how best to encounter the invader. Some reproached the rest that they had ever suffered the road to be made; others debated how best to destroy it. Olave your father, who was older now, and began to take his place among the men, smiled; and when the elders had all spoken, he said quietly, as was his wont,—

“‘Why hinder the bees from building? If we are strong and vigilant enough, they are but storing wax and honey for us. Is not the hero Herman, the son of Sigimer, among us? Has he not lived among the men of Rome, and learned their wisdom, while his heart remains true to his people? If we are united, and will obey him, will he not lead us to victory? Then shall their wondrous road—those long strands of their Roman web—lead them to be our prey, not us to be theirs.’

“But at the name of Herman the strife arose loud. Some said he was ambitious, and would make himself a king. Some, ‘that he was of another tribe, and no one could expect a freeman of the Attuarii to submit to a man of the Cherusci, be he wise and brave as he might. One tribe was as good as another, and one freeman worth as much as another. What right had any to rule where all were free?’ And so, in strife and debate, the meeting broke up.

“And Olave was grieved, and for once desponding ; and he said, as we took leave by the Roman road, which now passed close before our door,—

“‘ Maybe your father spoke too truly. Age foresees ; let youth prevent if possible. But these Romans are the road, and we the shingle. They are one, and we are many. They, many gathered into one. We, one crumbled into many.’

“ Perhaps I remember these words so well, because he spoke them on the eve of our marriage.

“Olave came to live in our home, and reared his forge beside the hut, and was as a son to my parents. And grandchildren grew up to minister to them, and to bear on their name, and to make their fading lives glad with new life, until we laid them underneath the soil of the forest, among the sires of our tribe.

“ But meantime the road was slowly doing its work. Roman soldiers traversed it northward into the land they knew not ; and soon young Germans began to traverse it southward into the land we knew not. An altar to Augustus Cæsar had been erected beyond the Elbe ; and many of our people saw that this unseen Augustus was indeed the strongest, and deemed it fit that he should be called divine, and that godlike honours should be paid to him as to any of the gods of Asgard. For our gods had not hindered the making of the roads ; and they live far off in Asgard, and the Rainbow Bridge between them

and us could be crossed at no man's will. But this road could be trodden by all freemen whensoever and whithersoever they would. And there were rumours of an earthly Asgard at the end; and of welcomes and revelries there more joyous than the feasts of the heroes, and of drink which made the heart of man more glad than the milk of Heidrun the goat of Valhalla, or the beer of the gods.

"Many of these youths passed us on their southward ventures.

"‘Let us go to the golden south,’ they said to Olave as they went on their southward way, whilst he sharpened their weapons. ‘We are strong, and these strangers are wise. Let us learn their wisdom, and our strength shall win their spoils. Go thou with us. Learn to forge weapons like theirs. And then thy strong right arm shall wield them as no Southern man can.’

There was a time when your father was tempted. For the magic road stretched into the distance before us always, enticing the imagination like the witchery of an evil Rune. But he resisted and stayed, for our sakes; for me and the little ones. And gradually the wish wore away.

"For few Northern men came back, and those seemed to us to have grown neither wise nor strong. They looked little like the heroes. They had lost the strength of the north, and had not gained the wisdom of the south; and the tales they brought of the City Rome were more

like rumours of the abyss, of the dwellings of darkness, than of the golden homes.

“At last the road finished its work for us. Tiberius Cæsar, the emperor, built ships and launched them on the Northern Sea, and sailed up the river Elbe, piercing far into our land. And at the same time, by a wondrous concert, such as it seemed to us only the gods could bring to pass, another army came thundering along the fatal road, through the valley of the Lippe, past our doors; and at the appointed place—one through seas and rivers unknown to them, and the other through marsh and forest, and both through a hostile land—the armies met. What they did when they thus magically met was not the point of moment. The meeting was the marvel. Who but gods could thus foresee and conquer the future, and live and order in the months to come as if they were to-day?

“It was reported that an aged chief of our people paddled in his canoe across the Elbe to touch the hand of Tiberius, and cried, ‘What madness to contend against these unseen divinities. I, by the grace of Cæsar, this day have seen a god!’

“And so the whole land was subdued, and called a Province of the City Rome. Then Varus, the plunderer, was sent to govern us. And along the road came not soldiers only, but the tax-gatherer and the lictor. And we learned what Roman rule meant. This Varus had come from the East, where, they say, men have had their

manhood long crushed out of them, and bear anything, like beasts of burden ; and he thought to rob and ruin us as easily. We whose men had not had the free manhood crushed out of them—whose women could at need be as brave as the men !

“ He thought to rule us with rods, as if we had been slaves or beasts of burden. He would compel our men to work at road and wall. The labour we thought no shame. Our bravest were smiths and builders—workers in iron and wood. Nor did we think it shame to learn, where the men of Rome were wiser than we. Men who will not learn are for ever babes. Labour and learning are no degradation for the noblest : Siward, my son, never think they are. But to be driven to labour like beasts ;—this no freeman or freewoman would bear.

“ Moreover the tyrant was base. He oppressed us, not for his people or his City Rome, but for himself—to fill his coffers with treasure, the produce of our blood and toil. Tyranny, whose end was greed,—how could that stand ?

“ So there was storm and tumult everywhere—fires at night, feuds by day ; but no great deliverance wrought, until Herman the hero rose, and insnared the insnarer, and the three legions perished in the Teutoberger Forest. And Varus, the covetous oppressor, could not brave his fate, but fled from it, falling on his own sword.

“ Among the pines of the Teutoberger Forest they fell, and to this day the turf is green around their bones ;

nor, for all their boasting, are their eagles all won back.

“Then our people reared altars in the forest. There were sacrifices to the powers of darkness, for such there are; and it is hard to know which are the stronger, the powers of evil or of good. Wherefore the evil powers must be appeased.

“Your father was there, and he told me the men of Rome, the victims, for the most part met their fate bravely as could the bravest among us, so that his heart was grieved for them. It is not wrong, I think, for women or for men to pity. But pity must never weaken the arm in striking for our people. For the races of men are diverse, and their fathers, and their gods; and each must be true to his own.

“That was a glorious time for our people. For once we were united. The oppressor was slain; the invaders fled; the forts were deserted.

“And once more the great road stretched before us, through the valley of the winding Lippe, among the meadows and the forests, untrodden by Roman feet; a bridge, your father said, whereon the Germans should yet cross and storm the golden city, and win the wisdom which holds the key of all the treasures.

“But they came back—too surely the invaders came back. They say these Romans have two sacred places, with their guardian gods. The first is the hearth with the hearth-gods, which every man must defend with life.

This we Germans understand. To us also the hearth is sacred. Perfidious more than to the men of Rome.

"But the Romans have another sacred place, and a god they call Boundary: the end as the other is the beginning, the goal as the other is the starting-point, of the ways of men; a god who advances, but never retreats.

"To them the utmost limit of their empire is sacred as the inmost sanctuary of their home. And where once this god Boundary sets up his stone, thither at last must the tide of Rome reach, and thence must it never roll back. Or if beaten back again and again, there must the tide at the end rise and remain.

"In vain, therefore, had we driven these Romans back, and given the bones of their vanquished legions to blanch on the green sod of our forests. Their god Boundary must be avenged, and his sacred place maintained; and back swept the overwhelming tide from far-off inexhaustible sources, unknown to us. Once more they come up the Lippe valley, and the fatal road thundered with the roll of waggons and the tread of the legions.

"And there were battles and betrayals.

"This Cæsar they call Germanicus came against us again. Once more the Roman armies were thrust through our confederate tribes. The solid wedge among the crumbling confederacies. The road against the shingle. The strong among us were driven back or crushed. The weak were split into countless fragments.

Once more their armies passed along the road of the Lippe valley into the Teutoberger Forest. They saw the bones of the slaughtered legions of Varus, and lamented over them, and raised over them the funeral mound. And there, in the Teutoberger Forest, our best and bravest fell at the end of the fatal road. Your father and your brothers fell within sight of our home ; and ere they fell we whom they died to defend had been betrayed to the foe by our own people.

“They bring no captives taken by the sword to grace this triumph. Nothing but a few women and children basely sold. Did I not see the legions return from our forests ?

“We were in captivity in the Roman camp by the Rhine.

“The whole camp had been thrown into confusion by rumours of the rout of the legions. Another slaughter of Varus, they said, another army swallowed up in the depths of the Teutoberger Forest !

“They did not feel secure behind their defences, though the Rhine lay between them and our people. They clamoured to break down the bridge, lest the conquering Germans should rush into the camp after the flying legions.

“The heart of many a German captive beat high with hope that day. By evening whom might we not be welcoming ?

“But no welcomes were in store for us !

“ Agrippina, the brave matron, went to the further end of the bridge—the end nearest the dreaded foe—and thence none could induce her to move. She stood there with her boy Caligula, the darling of the camp, and forbade them to touch the bridge until the fugitives, if such there were to be, were safe over it.

“ And soon, instead of a rout of fugitives, appeared the heads of the legions marching in order. They marched before her, four unbroken legions ; learning, doubtless, as they passed what they owed to her. And as they passed she spoke brave words of welcome to them, and of cheer to the wounded. And with her own hands she ministered to their wants. A noble, helpful woman. I think it no shame to serve her.

“ Yet scarcely did that army come back like conquerors. No songs of triumph, such as our Germans sing when they have overcome ; and no spoils, nor any prisoners.

“ Neither did it seem to us glorious when, a few weeks afterwards, Germanicus himself came back with his horsemen for the most part on foot, and the footmen lightened of much of their armour, and poorly clad, and their numbers sorely thinned.

“ It was said these legions had suffered for their heroic faithfulness to the Law and Order which make their strength ; that being commanded to march within sight of the Northern Sea, they had obeyed too loyally, and had been swept away in the rapid rising of its tides.

“ But when another weary year had passed away over

us still captive in the camp, and once more Germanicus came back to winter quarters, and there was talk again of a great Roman victory, the victors brought little token of their conquests.

“Slowly his shattered fleet came up the broad waters of our Rhine to that Colonia they have called Agrippina, after his brave wife; many of their oars lost, soldiers’ cloaks hoisted instead of the torn sails, and the men full of tales of dreadful fierce sea-monsters, and of wrecks among wild men. Yet again no spoils, and no prisoners, and no sign of the god Boundary having set up his pillars deeper in our forests.

“The only spoils, the only prisoners still are we, betrayed women and children. Yet to-morrow they will drive us before the conqueror’s car, and will shout that the Germans are vanquished.

“What matters it, my son? Words do not alter things that are, though they may hide them for a time. If the spring has come, let the ice glitter as it may, it will break under their boastful tread. The betrayed Thusnelda, the noble young wife of our Herman, need not break her heart, although she bear his captive babe in her arms at this Roman triumph.

“Her heart need not break, save for the treachery of her father. For Herman lives; and who knows who beside?

“Our long, weary journey along the fatal road is all but done.

“At the other end in the Teutoberger Forest lie the bones of the legions of Varus, and, alas! of many of our noblest Germans, before whom Varus fell. The winds are sighing among the pines above them, as I speak, and the grass is slowly growing over them.

“The solid building has broken up the shingle.

“We are coming at last to where the fatal road begins. It has drawn us on at last into the magic web it binds together. My father's fears have proved true. It has done its evil work for us. To-morrow we shall tread its first steps, helpless captives, creeping slowly up the hills of Rome!”

She was silent.

The two—mother and son—sat together at the tent door on the hills, in imaginative simplicity one almost as much a child as the other.

Behind them their own forests: the scattered forest-huts, the keen individual life of personal adventure and self-defence—the life of the family or the clan, with its ideal of freedom and of loyalty. Behind them the free forest-life, with its precarious relations with men, and its close relationships with the beasts of the field: the bear and the wolf endued for them with a kind of demoniacal personality; the fox and the squirrel and the birds with a quaint humorous mischief; the sheep and even the swine regarded as part of the family; the dog for the first time understood, his wistful speechlessness interpreted, his kindly ways and his loyal devotion appreciated, like

so many other good things, created by being comprehended.

Behind them their own wild forests, with their clearings and their wildernesses, their little rounded green worlds of home, embosomed in impenetrable mysteries of space multiplied visibly by the countless pillars of the pines.

Before them Rome, the wonder-working name which was a spell throughout the earth.

They had indeed passed many a fair city on their southward way—from Colonia and Treves.

But these were mere gatherings of ordinary men.

Rome was the inexhaustible source of armies, the goal of all roads and their starting-point, the city of kings, the empress of cities, the throne of the empire.

As the dusk slowly dissolved before the day, and the road ceased to be the one distinctly defined object before them, and the evergreen oaks and bays near at hand rose from their masses of shade into individual existence, whilst the forms of distant rocks and woods became defined against the sky, and through the openings of the hills came glimpses of the rolling surges of the green Campagna, and the tremulous shining of the far-off sea, the two watchers strained their eyes in the vain expectation of catching the glitter of golden roofs, or the shimmer of walls which must surely have something in them of a magical beauty and an imperial stateliness different from all things else in the world.

They sat gazing—the mother and son—into the glory

of the southern dawn. But no earthly walls met their gaze—only the splendour of crimson and purple clouds and the deep golden spaces between.

As they were watching the beautiful day unfold like a flower, the silence was broken by a low wail from a large building just becoming visible through the shadows of the valley below. A low, helpless wail, breaking every now and then into a shriek of agony.

“It is from the slave prison belonging to the beautiful house among the trees!” said Siguna, with a shudder; “some one is being scourged or tortured there. Some one perhaps of race higher than the master for whom he toils.”

The large building was indeed one of the terrible slave-factories, from which the field-work of the great Roman estates was done—scenes often of unutterable degradation and suffering, being also prisons and places of punishment for refractory slaves sent thither from the city households.

The beautiful morning was still calmly unfolding in the sky, and point after point of the hills was kindling with her light, tree after tree waking up its happy birds to welcome her, and all the sweet flowers that had been long ready with their cups full of dew waiting for her sisterly kiss greeting her with the fragrance which is their music.

But through all pierced those cries of human pain. It was long before the shrieks died away again into the low,

helpless wail with which they had begun. And till they had ceased neither mother nor son spoke.

Then the boy said,—

“Is there not a city of the gods above? I used to think we caught glimpses of it at dawn and sunset. And that when the common working daylight hid it from us it was still there, golden and glorious as ever, for the gods; shaded by the Tree of Life, with the pure fountains where they feast and take counsel. Is it true? Is there a city of the gods?”

“So it was said by them of old time,” she replied.

“Is Asgard then for the Æsir, as Rome is for the Romans? And do the gods heed the miseries of all men, as little as the Romans the miseries of the Germans?”

“It would almost seem so,” she said.

“Yet,” he said, “it is something that there is one happy place in the world, where all are good and just. In Asgard there are no cries of agony! No wrong and cruelty to mar the feasting there!”

“I know not, my son,” she replied, mournfully. “Who knows? Even there, it is said, malice, and pain, and evil chance are strong. It is said that the fairest hall in Asgard was darkened by the shadow of death, when the best and the brightest of all the gods fell on his own hearth, slain by cunning and evil chance, by an instrument so insignificant none had deemed it worth while to guard against it—by the little mistletoe, sent by the

hand of the darkest of all, the malicious one, who was once a god. It is said the fairest home in Asgard itself stands empty and desolate."

"But hereafter, one day, when all things have been swept away and made new again," he said, "after the storm-age, and the wolf-age, and the years of frost, then will not the just reign, and death and malice be gone?"

"I know not, my son," she said; "how can I know? Some say the gods and the evil giants will slay each other in that day, and that if victory is with the gods, it will be for new gods and new men, not for those we know. And Death, they say, can never be slain. But who knows? Who can say which is the strongest?—right or wrong? the good or the evil? light or darkness? death or life? in earth, or in the under-world, or above?"

"On earth, there seems little doubt. Wrong seems strongest here," said the boy—"wrong and death. The cunning seem stronger than the wise, and the wily than the brave. Else why should Herman the hero be wandering defeated in the forests, and his young wife be mourning betrayed and helpless here? Is there no place where wrong and death cannot come? no time when justice and truth will rule? Nowhere a happy city of the good? never a victory for the light? Does no one know? Do none of these Romans know?"

"They seem not to know anything that makes them pure and just," she replied.

"Mother," he murmured, "do the dead know?"

"They must know, I think—they who have passed out of the strife and the illusions."

"Then surely," he said, "it is not worth living, and it were better to die, and know."

"To die to know *what*, my son?" she said, with a quiet hopelessness sadder than the bitterest cry of pain.

"Mother," he said, gently, "I spoke as a coward. For thee and Hilda it is worth while to live; for you and for hope."

So they sat, the mother and son, as long afterwards Monica and Augustine, gazing into the depths of the sky.

But to them it held no City of God, stretching up the heights of heaven, with gates on earth open to man; only a far-off city of the gods, inaccessible to man, but not to sin or death—or a dim Valhalla, with shadowy repetitions of the wars and feastings of earth, the self-sacrifice which ennobles the wars of earth, the home affections which consecrate its feasts, left out; no Fountain of Life; no Just One, human to understand and judge, mighty to deliver, divine to forgive.

The universe for them rested on no eternal pillars of justice, but was tossed on the abyss of frost and fire from which it sprang.

Nevertheless, in their inmost hearts rose a temple in ruins, yet never entirely levelled save by wilful hands from within. Unquenchable love, yearnings for justice and truth, and undying hope, were there, reflecting a light they could not see.

Thus the hour of waiting passed. The dawn came up and was gone. From an unfathomable sea of glory the sky became the lighted roof of the dwelling-place of man. And the camp awoke with buzz of eager voices, and the stir of thousands, and the din of arms, to the day of the great triumph.

The din and stir of the day had begun, drowning in its cataracts of varied sound the wails which had pierced the stillness of the morning. Siguna was summoned to the tent of Agrippina, and Siward was left alone.

An irresistible impulse of curiosity and sympathy urged him to find out what had caused those wails of anguish.

Alone, therefore, after his mother had gone, he found an opportunity to creep down the hill-side to the place whence the cries proceeded, and there, on a hillock, visible from a great distance around, he had seen a number of slaves set up two cross pieces of wood with a living man nailed to them.

They supported his feet with a piece of wood, so that he was not altogether suspended, and then the executioners and the spectators dispersed, leaving the victim exposed in his ignominy and agony to die slowly of pain and hunger.

From the opposite slope where Siward stood the writhings of the tortured victim were only too visible, and his cries only too clearly heard. For a few minutes Siward stood trembling, fascinated by the revolting sight.

Then he turned back to the camp. As he turned away, he met a fisherman carrying a basket of fish to the villa to which the slave-prison belonged.

There must have been a deep horror imprinted on the boy's face, for the man answered it.

"It is only a slave!" he said, as he passed. "None but the basest criminals, or slaves, are punished thus."

"Will he be long dying?" Siward asked.

"Not many days. It depends partly on whether they can sleep. The masters think this a good way to show the slaves, now and then, what they can do if they like. It is not so very long since the last slave-insurrection. And they do not want another."

And the fisherman passed on.

But from Siward's mind that dreadful image never faded.

He trusted his mother knew nothing of it. But in many a lonely hour it came back on him, and gave a feverish intensity to all his endeavours to work out his own liberation and that of his people from a tyranny which reserved such tortures for those it dreaded.

And all the while, as the weary feet of the captives had been treading, step by step, league after league of the Roman road, the feet of the Holy and the Just were treading the terraces and thymy slopes of the valley of Nazareth.

From those heavens into which they had been gazing so hopelessly, not twenty years before, a great multitude

of the heavenly host had burst on the sight and hearing of men with songs of peace and victory.

Deep in the stony heart of that magnificent and corrupt empire, against which the tribes of the north were breaking their strength, was springing up the little germ of immortal life which was to shiver the empire to its foundations, and be the true Tree of Life to the young nations of the north.

The whole world was tremulously astir in dim expectation of the dawn. The whole earth was waiting on the eve of the Great Triumph.

And the Conqueror was already there. The Light of the world had come into the world.

But the world knew Him not.





CHAPTER II.

THE long march from the North was over. Rewards and honours had been assigned to the soldiers who had distinguished themselves; the accustomed largesses to all the troops.

The Roman Senate, still following the forms of the Republic, had met and welcomed the army; the conqueror mounted his chariot, and the splendid spectacle of the Triumph of Germanicus began.

There was nothing to mar the outward splendour and glory of the sight. No blots of shapeless, colourless dress, or of poor gaudy colour among the spectators; no awkward struggling with the perplexities of unwonted costume among the actors in the procession; no sense of incongruity or anachronism in any one.

Outwardly not a discord. Priests and magistrates stepping with an easy dignity in their accustomed robes, the flowing folds of the white togas made white as any fuller on earth could white them, contrasting with the rich purple of the borders, or the saffron robes of the augurs, all the colours harmonizing as inevitably as a bed of crocuses.

Then came the bands of trumpeters, with the battle-music which, more than any other, peals clear to us across the ages, with the changeless intervals of the heart-stirring calls which have to be heard above the din of arms and the cries of conflict, or through the folds of sleep.

Next, the spoils of war, with symbols and pictures of the conquered places, borne aloft.

In this case there were few spoils to exhibit. Gold and silver vessels, embroidered raiment, statue and picture, were not to be found among these poor barbarians; and models of cities could not be constructed where the cities were at best collections of mud huts. This part of the procession, therefore, consisted of pictures of the mountains and rivers, which were all the Germans had to lose; and of battles, which, if the truth had been told, they had not altogether lost. These, carried aloft on horizontal trays, with large panels on which were blazoned the names of the tribes said to be conquered—Chatti, Cherusci, Angrivarii—were all the results that could be shown. For, neither were the beasts of the German forests glorious for triumphal processions. No ponderous elephants to be laden with barbaric trappings; no grand tawny, tropical wild beasts. Bears there might have been, and wolves,—if the wolf foster-mother were not too sacred a memory to be dragged in derision by the people of Romulus.

After the spoils came the peace music; the band of flute-players with their festive suggestions of dance and song.

Next, the priests with the sacred white oxen, their gilded horns garlanded for sacrifice.

Then the only tangible spoils of the German war, the captive Germans themselves, a goodly procession, chained, and drawn out in long files, that the eyes of the Roman people might feast on these signs of the humiliation of their foes, a humiliation sweetened by the recollection of recent terrors, by its being an avenging of the legions of Varus, vanquished and slaughtered by the fathers of these captives among the rivers and mountains pictured in the front of the procession.

First came a fair young mother with a babe in her arms, Thusnelda, paraded alone in the front, that no eye might miss her ; yet, "neither subdued to tears, nor using the language of supplication ;" still proud to be the wife of Herman, so lately conqueror of Varus.

The band of captives was large and noble. It was perhaps possible for the spectators to forget that neither Herman nor any of the warriors who had fought by his side were among them, but only these women and children, not captured in fair field, but betrayed by a base kinsman.

Then, preceded by the lictors with laurel-wreathed fasces, in single file, came the chariot of the Conqueror, himself a kingly-looking man, of the old Roman type, the object of a genuine popular enthusiasm, unpurchased, and indeed most jealously discouraged by the emperor ; the idol of the Roman people, and worthy of the love of a nobler people than they had sunk to be.

Twenty miles the citizens had poured forth along the Flaminian Way, in the heat of a Roman May, to welcome him back.

Pure and sacred memories of good women, worthy of the Roman ideal days, made a halo round him, the grandson of the faithful and heroic Octavia. His mother, the pure and beautiful Antonia, still lived. His own wife, Agrippina, had shown herself capable of courageous devotion as high as that of any patriotic matron of the republic, or of the heroes who kept the bridge "in the brave days of old."

In those corrupt days the home and the life of Germanicus were such as to kindle a glow of affectionate admiration in a corrupt and hardened people.

His five young sons stood in the chariot beside him.

Happily no eye in the admiring crowd could see that one of these was to be the Emperor Caligula, or that the daughter not there was to be the mother of Nero.

He himself, if not the skilful general they believed him, was a brave soldier, and a commander who inspired his troops with an enthusiasm for his person such as only men of genuine power of some kind can awaken. Ardent and impulsive, as more than one incident in his life proves him, the fervour of his character never led him beyond the sacred bounds of duty, such as he understood it; chiefly, in all probability, because his ambition was not selfish.

Twice, it is said, he was almost on the point of rushing, by his own act, out of life.

Once some years before, when he had quelled the perilous mutiny which arose, on the death of Augustus, in the army of the Rhine, and the soldiers cried, "Cæsar Germanicus will not endure to be a subject," and would have carried him to Rome and proclaimed him Emperor in place of his adoptive father the new Emperor Tiberius. To him the intended honour was the threat of an impious disgrace. He had risked his life to restore the legions to their duty to Rome. Better die himself than be seduced or driven from his duty to Cæsar!

And once again, a few months since, when many of his faithful veterans had been wrecked on the North German coast; so keen was his grief at their loss that he would gladly have perished in the sea beside them. His soldiers' lives were dear to him as his own life.

Eloquent words burned naturally on lips enkindled by such a heart. He was held to be a poet and orator of no mean stamp.

As he stood in the prime of his strength, among his boys, in the triumphal chariot, robed in the embroidered toga, sceptred and laurel-crowned, all Rome did well to throng every inch of the pavements and every step of the temples along the Sacred Way in his honour, and to send up clouds of incense from every altar.

He stood before them a pathetic witness, amidst all their degradation, of what their inmost hearts held good, of what each Roman was meant to be.

Behind the triumphal chariot marched the soldiers, shouting, "Io Triumphe," singing and jesting.

So the stately show swept along the Sacred Way—past the Forum, with its army of statues; and up the Capitoline; past the temples, with the broad flights of steps crowded with gazers, the May sunshine lighting up the dazzling white robes, glowing on the purple and saffron, flashing back from brazen spear and shield. Slowly it swept up the old sacred hill through air sweet with the fragrance of countless fresh garlands and with incense from a thousand shrines, vibrating with music martial and festive, and with the triumphs and the welcomes of all the people of Rome.

Slowly it swept on, until at a point on the ascent it suddenly paused. The German captives had reached the state-prison on the Capitol.

Then from the fettered band, according to ancient Roman custom, were withdrawn some of the noblest among them, never to reappear. Young and in the prime of strength, with no crime but that of being enemies of Rome, they were led from the midst of the captives, from the festive throng and the May sunshine, within the door of the prison by the wayside. And there, in the darkness of the Mamertine dungeons, the exiles were cast down to die unpitied, while all Rome was keeping holiday outside.

Very slowly the moments of that terrible pause passed for three of the captives. A deeper pallor spread over

the face of the mother Siguna as she drew the child Hilda closer to her. Siward's brow flushed, and he looked round to see if there were one token of pity in the festive throng. There was a slight silence, a little more eager pressing forward of the crowd to see ;—and that was all.

The boy heard no sound of compassion, and caught no glance of pity in man or woman.

Only from one little deformed girl, who happened to be pushed near him in the throng. He heard her ask an old man who was taking care of her what they were doing with those fair boys.

"They are going to kill them, and throw them into the dungeons," he said.

"But it is a festival," she said ; "could they not wait?"

"It is part of the festivity," was the reply. "The Roman people enjoy strong contrasts. They have a different idea of the drama from that which we Grecks had. They like their tragedy real."

The little maiden looked perplexed. There was a quiet bitterness in the tone of the old man which made Siward glance up in his face for an explanation. The face was not bitter. There was a sarcastic curve about the lips, but the dark eyes met the boy's with a kindness so different from the expression of the other faces around him, that it made him remember the countenance.

The impression was deepened by what followed.

At that moment there was a rush amongst the crowd to catch a glimpse of the condemned captives. In the pressure, the little deformed girl was separated from the old man and thrown down amidst the band of captives. She might have been trodden on and hurt, but that Siward, with an irresistible instinct of protection, gently lifted her up, and, fettered as he was, bore her to a safe place on some steps by the way-side. There the old man quickly found and rejoined her, and was beginning to thank him, when, with rude words and blows, the boy was driven back into the procession which he had disarranged.

The whole was the work of a moment, but for Siward it was a moment of balm.

For that moment the bewildering pomp and the bewildering sense of wrong were lifted from his heart, and it was brought close to other human hearts.

In Rome then, too, amidst that triumphant, insulting crowd, were infirmity, and suffering, and pity!

The large soft eyes that had thanked him from the wan, suffering little face, and the words and tones of the old Greek slave, haunted him, and seemed half to awaken him from a terrible dream.

He had great need of some such drops of healing, for the day was bitterer than he had thought.

It was not so easy to despise the contempt and derision of a whole people—to be driven or dragged chained and enslaved, a gazing-stock for thousands of

hostile eyes—he, and his mother, and the helpless little sister. Often he wished he had not learned the Latin tongue so well during that long captivity in the camp by the Rhine. It might have been easier not to understand the words of satisfied revenge or scornful raillery, or, worse still, of scornful praise, flung at them as at well-made dogs or horses. He hoped his mother did not hear. When he looked at her, her face seemed calm.

It was bitterer than he had thought. To have fought for his people and been fairly captured could have been borne; but not easily thus to be entrapped like vermin, and then exhibited as a fair fruit of conquest, and not to be able to say to the exulting crowd,—

“We were betrayed, we were not conquered. If you had tried it fairly with us in battle, we or you should have been left on the field. We would never have been here.”

And worse than all was this terrible pause, the wrenching of their brethren from them without possibility of farewell or lamentation.

With a fierce joy the boy's thoughts went back to the forest of the Teutoberg, to the Roman victims slain there in honour of the German gods—to the blanched bones of the legions left so long unburied and unavenged.

Slowly, drop by drop, the bitter venom distilled into his heart.

And in all heaven and earth there was nothing to counteract or ward off the poison save the patient

face of the mother at his side, and the little touch of human sympathy which came to him through the eyes of the deformed girl and in the tones of the old slave.

For it was not in the Roman Forum that men had erected an altar to Pity.

In all the temples by which they passed there was no sanctuary of sorrow, no image of a Divine Sufferer overcoming by enduring.

In all the sunny heavens through which he gazed he knew of no judgment-seat where there was certainty of justice for all, far less of a mercy-seat, where there was certainty of infinite pity for all.

At length the dreadful pause in the march was over; the sign was given that the executions had been accomplished, and the massacred captives were lying dead in the darkness below; and the splendid show swept on again in the May sunshine, with the battle trumpets and festive flutings, through flowers and incense, to the Temple of the Capitoline Jove, where, beside the king of the gods, the old god Boundary had kept his ancient shrine.

Then came the sacrificing of oxen, and the laying of the wreath of victory on the lap of the statue of Jove.

So Siguna and her children trod the last steps of the fatal road, and finished the weary march from the latest pillar of the god Boundary among the forests of their native northern land, to his earliest shrine on the rock of the Capitol.

The sacred services being ended in the temple, the feastings began, the procession broke up into numberless little knots of revellers, each portion of it coalescing with some portion of the crowd, eager to entertain the triumphant army, or to listen to stories of hairbreadth 'scapes among the unknown northern seas, whose waves had risen against their legions, like some of the hideous monsters they contained, and swallowed up half an army.





CHAPTER III.

ON the evening of the Triumph the boy Siward having escaped for a time from the revelries of the other slaves of Germanicus, stood leaning against a pillar of the palace portico.

It had been an imbittering day for him. The revelries among the slaves had been worse than the ignominy of the procession ; for they had given him a glimpse into the unutterable debasement of the slave-household of which that day the German captives had been the scoff and jest.

If slavery did not debase the slave as well as the slave-owner, it must soon put an end to itself. The slave, purified by suffering, must rise above the master, degraded by inflicting it. But the cruelest thing in cruelty is its tendency to make the sufferer cruel. And in this Roman slavery there were depths both of cruelty and of degradation scarcely to be reached under any form of Christianity.

In addition to his bitter sense of wrong, the poor boy had also the pain of sorely bruised limbs, not made

easier to bear by the sense that he had brought this pain on himself.

In his simplicity, when questioned as to his parentage, he had said with some pride that his father was of noble blood, and worked at a smith's forge of his own; the forge being in his mind as much a subject to glory in as the noble birth.

The torrent of derisive witticisms which this confession had brought on the "patrician blacksmith," and on his mother, had altogether overwhelmed the poor boy's resolutions to practise silent endurance as the only possible dignity for the slave. In a moment of uncontrollable irritation, he had made up for his want of Latin wit by dealing a very effective barbarian blow against the most unendurable of his tormentors, which had brought on a general assault, ending in his being thrown on the ground, beaten, and trampled on. Indeed, but for the fact of many of the assailants being too much the worse for wine to aim their blows well, he might scarcely have escaped and contrived to creep away under the shadow of the portico as he had done.

He had not been resting there long when the sound of flutes and pipes echoed along the slopes of the Palatine, and in a few moments the torch-bearers came in sight of the palace, bringing Germanicus back with songs and shouts to his home.

The captive boy shrank further into the shadow. For a few minutes the laurel-garlanded portico echoed

with congratulations and leave-takings. Then Germanicus retired within the house, the festive band gradually dispersed, the blaze of the torches died out one by one in the distance, and Siward was left alone with the stars.

At last that bitter day had worn to its close ! The day of ignominy was over, he thought, for the captives, and the life of bondage and suffering had begun. For Germanicus, the day of triumph was over, and the life of glorious power and activity was but beginning ! How wide apart the beginning of the two roads led ! “How much wider,” the poor boy thought, recalling with a shudder the slave-revellers from whom he had escaped, and the wail from the slave-prison among the hills, “might not the end be ! What could he do but grow brutish or wicked like the rest, and perhaps by-and-by be as cruel to some new sufferer as they had been to him ?” A terrible sense of being destined, not only to suffer, but to sink through suffering, was on him ; of a curse which reached not only to the body but to the soul. These brutish bondsmen around him had sunk beneath it. What hand in heaven or on earth could save him ?

The love which was a torch kindled by the Love he knew not, came once more to his rescue.

The mother's gentle hand rested on his drooping head. He knew her touch, although he did not at once look up. But the ice began to melt from his heart, and slow

burning tears fell through the fingers clasped on his brow.

“My son,” she said, “you have done bravely to-day.”

He shook his head.

She had not witnessed the scene among the slave-revellers. He thought she did not know, and he would not for the world have told her.

“Siward,” she continued, “your words in the dawn on the hill-side strengthened me to-day. I did walk like a crowned queen between my children.”

The hidden tears fell slower, but more bitterly. “Little reason had she,” he thought, “to feel proud of her poor helpless, beaten, slave-boy.”

“Siward,” she went on, “I have had a great proposal for you to-day. A Roman patrician lady saw you to-day in the procession, and she and her husband coveted you. They asked our Lady Agrippina about you. They have no son, and they want to adopt you for their own. Once they thought they had too many children, and, according to one of their wicked customs, they cast out their own helpless babes to die, that they might have no more trouble with them. But a pestilence came and swept away those they had saved. Now, they have no child but one, who is a virgin priestess of some goddess, and one a sickly mis-shapen girl, who was rescued by a Greek slave. And the Roman lady envied me as I walked beside you, my son, and wishes to adopt you for her own, and to call you by their name, Clœlius.”

He looked up.

"I am Siward the son of Siguna and Olave the smith," he said. "They can make me their slave. I will never call myself the son of a Roman woman and a murderess. I am thy son, mother, thine."

She said nothing. She had expected nothing else. But with that free determination of the will, the bondage had passed from his soul.

Battered and bruised as he was, the sense reawoke within him of being something which blows could not crush, nor fetters bind. His inmost self was free with the only freedom worth having—the freedom of loving and choosing, of choosing rather to suffer anything than to desert those whom he loved.

Not that he reasoned this out, or could have spoken of the immortal invisible spirit within. What he was conscious of was, not of having a soul, but of having a mother whom he loved.

"Mother," he said, "you had no hesitation about the answer?"

"Not any," she replied; "we could not give up your father's name."

"And I would not grow like these Romans," he said. "Better be their slave than be themselves, mother," he added after a pause. "I have seen and heard terrible things to-day; and I have had a terrible dread. But you have saved me."

"Dread of what?" she said.

"Of growing like these Romans and their slaves!" he said. "Of growing to despise all women as if I had never had a mother; to disbelieve in all goodness, as if I had never known you; to be ashamed of work; to dishonour all that makes men men and women women; the terror of sinking through the pleasures of swinish beasts revelling in garbage and wallowing in the mire, to the pleasures of wild beasts revelling in the torture of their victims, as the Romans do in their games, and (if the slaves speak truth) in their homes. But this dread is gone; you have come and saved me."

"What have I done?" she said; "what can I do?"

"You have done what Siguna the wife of Loki did. Surely it was a prophetess who named thee," he said. "When the gods had bound him fast, and the serpent dropped venom on his face, did not Siguna hold the cup so that the serpent's venom could not fall on him, and burn into his heart? The cup is your heart, mother, and you have saved me."

"Child," she said, "what are you saying; you are not Loki the malignant; you, my brave, bright boy?"

"No," he said, smiling, "I am not Loki yet. Stay thou near me, and I will never be like him."

So the boy interpreted the lovely legend of Loki and Siguna.* For dark as were those old heathen conceptions

* It is not meant to intimate by this that this legend or other Northern legends alluded to in these pages were as ancient as the first century; but to take them as types of the belief and imagination from which at one time or another the Northern Sagas sprang.

of the gods, often on some subordinate figure in an obscure corner of the picture, falls a strange beautiful light from a source unseen and unexplained.

The gods were often hard and cruel, or careless and cold. But in some human creature, such as Siguna, wife of Loki, burns a little lowly spark of unquenchable love, or invincible patience, stronger and more divine, lovelier and loftier than all the might of Asgard or Olympus.

For throughout those ages while men made the gods, it was God who made man.

The mother went into the house and found a mat and an old mantle, in which she wrapped up her boy's bruised limbs; and soon he fell asleep with the sleep of youth.

But she watched above him and wept. For very feeble she felt her hands to be to keep off the poisonous drops. Feeble woman's hands, and fettered, and who could say how long the gods, or the Romans who seemed their favourites and vicegerents on earth, would allow even this?

So she looked hopelessly up to the calm, bright stars, and the beautiful, impenetrable night. But soon she ceased to weep. For there was no heart to appeal to, or to weep on. If there were gods above those stars, either, for some unknown offence, they had turned against her, or they did not rule as far south as Rome, or the gods of Rome were stronger, or, which was perhaps the

most likely thing of all, they were shining still in Asgard, bright and calm as the stars, and as inaccessible.

The wail could not rise into prayer, therefore it died into despairing silence.

Yet Siguna and Siward, the German captives, were not the only persons in Rome to whom that day had been little of a festival.

In his new palace on the western slopes of the Palatine was dwelling one to whose heart every shout of applause to Germanicus had been a drop of the bitterest venom. And by him on the icy summit where he sat was no faithful hand to ward off the bitter drops.

From youth, Tiberius Cæsar had breathed the atmosphere of desecrated homes. His mother, the Empress Livia, had consented to be divorced from his father to share the throne of Augustus. He himself had reluctantly consented to abandon Vipsania, the beloved wife of his youth, sister of Agrippina the noble wife of Germanicus, to become the husband of Julia, the only daughter of Augustus, a woman who despised him, and whom not without reason he hated ; for her crimes, afterwards banished by her own father to the fatal island of Pandataria.


The bonds between him and his mother, strong as they were, were not such as to soften or hallow life. On her side rather a dramatic impersonation than affection, accomplishing in her son an ambition she could not fulfil in her own person. On his, a habit of deference to her

authority and reverence to her judgment which nothing but death could break, but from which he felt her death an emancipation ; identification of interest without union of heart.

The sacred fire of his hearth being to him thus early extinguished, in its place was substituted a steel mirror, in which the world was reflected with exactness, but altogether without glow,—the world and himself.

Where the world, gazing within wall after wall of his imperial palace, and fold within fold of his purple draperies, caught glimpses of a mysterious divinity,—he saw an imperilled mortal “holding the Roman people as a wolf by the ears.”

On the icy summit where the dazzled nations saw a godlike form gloriously robed and crowned, grasping the lightnings, he, chill and undazzled, saw himself as he was, unillumined by the splendour, quivering beneath the lightnings he seemed to grasp. He knew that he saw but a little space beyond him, whilst within that little space he saw a world of perils, and beyond it a surging mist through which from time to time loomed on his anxious vision the forms of men greater than he threatening to rise and hurl him from his seat. At the centre of that omnipotent dominion he knew himself to be a mortal man, and not a great man. Honestly therefore he recommended all men not to worship him ; whilst he watched with suspicious vigilance for every token of a really great man, one “born a king,” that like Herod



he might "come and worship him,"—in Herod's fashion.

At the core of that Empire was a heart in which hope and love, and faith in woman, in man, or in heaven, were frozen to death ; a heart not cruel for cruelty's sake, but possessed by an ignoble fear and self-distrust, a cynical contempt of all who did him homage, and a desperate envious hatred of all whom his keen wit perceived were too clear-sighted or too noble to do him real homage in their hearts. At this time the great objects of his dread and envy were Cæsar Germanicus and Agrippina, whom his mother Livia also envied and disliked, and of whose lofty character, disbelieving in any noble source of such loftiness, Tiberius had an especial distrust.

To the Emperor, therefore, this day of the Triumph of Germanicus had been a day of humiliation. Not on account of the pomp whose hollowness he knew, but because he saw how the Roman people, the wolf whom he held so desperately by the ears, fawned with as fond a pride as the wolf foster-mother herself on the genial young soldier, nephew of Augustus, grandson of Octavia and Antony.

Nor to Germanicus himself (had the German captive known it as he saw him disappear within the portico) had that day been any more a true triumph than to any fettered captive in the procession.

He had been dragged in his triumphal chariot as reluctantly as Thusnelda herself before it.

Victory was what he had desired, not a hollow show of triumph. One campaign more in Germany, he believed, would have made him a true conqueror, would have driven back the German tribes effectually, and made the short line of the Elbe, instead of the long windings of the Rhine, the real frontier of the Empire.

From this career of conquest he had been torn, from purposes he deemed worthy of Roman ambition—"through envy torn away from a harvest of ripe glory"—to be detached for ever from the army which loved him, and for which he had cared with a true kingly care, and despatched hither and thither at the will of a man who would only envy and hate him the more, the more successfully he served him.

To him and to Agrippina—taken from her queenly place at the head of the veterans who honoured her as a matron of old Rome, and loved her boys with a household affection as at once their princes and play-fellows, to be entangled in the wretched intrigues of a court where a slight to her was regarded as a compliment to the Emperor's mother—that day was an evening, not a morning, a stepping from a high place in a free, large world, into the narrow tortuous ways about a degraded court.

No day of rejoicing to the conqueror, nor to the faithful troops he had led so long! They had not forgotten the day, years since, when the young Germanicus had won them back from mutiny by his presence, when they

had gathered around him with their wrongs, showing him the limbs bruised and wounded by the cruelty of under-officers, and pressing his hands on their toothless gums to prove by how long years of service they had merited a better reward ; nor how he had soothed them with promises, and with largesses from his own private means,—a royal generosity which Tiberius could not forgive.

Nor would they forget the day not long afterwards when once more he had shamed them back to order and allegiance, by threatening to withdraw Agrippina and the Roman ladies from the mutinous camp to the protection of the German allies at Treves.

The armies of Rome, after all, were themselves no such iron machines as they seemed, but aggregates of impressive human creatures—assemblies of impulsive passionate Italians, keen to feel wrongs and to resent them, capable of loving and trusting with romantic devotion when they found any one like Germanicus, a man of like passions with themselves, yet of keener insight and higher self-control than themselves, with a heart to care for them.

And now this strong, slowly-woven bond was to be rent asunder for ever. This body of living men, enthusiastically attached to a commander, was to become again, outwardly, a machine of state, and inwardly a conglomeration of separate atoms.

To Germanicus and his army it was a day of separation. The army dispersed among the citizens, once more

a mere fragment of the Empire. The conquering commander retired into his home a mere slave of the Emperor.

And sadly that night, in the homes of many a patrician palace, among its gardens on the hills of Rome—and in many of the crowded chambers of the people whose tall houses rose from the valleys below—among the few in that degraded population to whom the triumph was anything higher than one of the shows of the circus or the amphitheatre, came back the memory of Drusus, father of Germanicus; and Marcellus, his uncle; and of Julius Cæsar, first and noblest of the race, throwing its shadow on the future of one who, as the despairing presentiment of a corrupted and enslaved people told them, was too worthy of life to live long in such a time.

“For ever,” they said, “short-lived and unfortunate are those whom the Roman people love!”

Thus, in the laughter of that day of triumph there was heaviness, and its songs died into a hopeless wail in other hearts than those of the German captives.

And neither they nor any of the countless sufferers in that glittering, brilliant, hopeless Roman world knew of the heart that was beating for them in the home at Nazareth, the heart of Him, indeed “born a king,” in which fear had no place, glowing with faith and hope, and with unquenchable love for all; nor what cup was being prepared to gather into itself the venom of all the bitter drops, and ward them off from man.



CHAPTER IV.

IN the dusk of the May morning a young Roman maiden stood on the brink of a spring on the Cœlian Hill, in the garden of Clœlius Tullus. She stood or half leaned against the rock, from beneath which the pure fresh water was slowly trickling into her pitcher. Slight and lithe in form, from the firm poise of the graceful head to the planting of the small sandalled feet, which shone on the dark mossy turf below the long white stole, there was nevertheless a power blended with all the grace which encircled her with a kind of sweet awe. The joyous half-smiling lips; the dreamy dark eyes, which sent a light through the long lashes like the morning sunshine on the pure shaded spring she was watching; the hands folded not in lassitude, but with a firm clasp, as if they had embraced each other with a happy purpose, and would only part to help each other to execute it; the whole guileless expression of the face, full of soul as it was, seemed more childlike than womanly. The look of extreme youth was increased by the absence of long feminine tresses, and of all feminine ornament.

The hair, of a golden-brown, curled and clustered around the small head like a child's, and was only bound with a purple fillet.

Yet there was a majesty about the light delicate form and on the smooth straight brows. No mere imperial stateliness, something higher and freer—something to which any canopy of state would have seemed a tawdry appendage—something which in any temple of her gods would have made you feel it a sanctuary.

There was a slight rustle among the ilexes of the garden, and then a younger maiden, kneeling down before her, embraced her knees as if she had been the statue of a goddess.

“My beautiful!” said the child, “you are more divine than ever. No wonder they do not need any sacred images in the temple where you serve.”

The maiden stooped, and, raising the kneeling child, encircled her with one arm.

“Poor little sister,” she said, and her voice was simply her smile turned into music. The ring of a little child's laughter was in it, with the tenderness of a heavenly pity. For different, indeed, to all outward seeming, from herself was the poor misshapen child who clung to her with such an adoring, passionate fondness. The form that of a shrunken old woman; the face thin and wan, though not without beauty; the eyes deep with the sadness of a sorrowful womanhood.

“To-day is a great day with me, little sister,” said the

elder maiden, "and I may well be clothed with joy. Yesterday completed the ten years of my discipleship. This day, ten years since, our father led me to the High Priest, and the old man welcomed me to the service of Rome and the goddess, and consecrated me as the vestals of our ancient Alba were consecrated hundreds of years before Rome was born. 'Thee, beloved, I take,' he said, 'a vestal priestess, to minister in sacred things, to do for the Roman people what the best law has appointed.' And so, a little child, I was committed to the care of the sacred virgins, and had henceforth for my dwelling the dwelling of the goddess, for my hearth-fire the sacred hearth-fire of Rome.

"Ten years of training, slowly unfolding before me the meaning of that consecration, and now I too am to serve Rome for myself. This morning, for the first time, I shall sprinkle the pure water on the shrine of the goddess. To-night, for the first time, to me will be committed the charge of the sacred fire, to keep it for the Roman people, for the goddess, and for our Rome.

"Little sister, have I not reason to be glad?"

As she spoke she looked up. From the southern slopes of the hill where they stood among the gardens, beyond the undulating plain of the Campagna, still dusk, the dawn was flowing in a golden flood around the Alban hills. Peak after peak rose boldly from the plain, and as she glanced towards them at that moment a rosy light touched the highest of all, the site of the ancient temple

of Jupiter Latialis, the common shrine of the pristine Latia race.

“See, little sister,” she said, “the finger of the gods is touching the old temple of our fathers. Beneath it is lying in its deep hollow the Alban lake, and the ridge of the White City where our people were cradled, and the vestal princess dwelt, and the twin heroes were born. There is the marshy valley which the prince our forefather drained—the dictator, Clœlius—making the marshy land a fruitful field, and bringing the water to refresh the arid plain. The ancient channel is there which our father cut through the solid hills, and the waters are flowing through it still—in the dark under the rock arches, in the sunshine through the green Campagna, below us through the valley at our feet—waters from our Alban hills, brought hither to minister to the Roman people.

“Little sister, last night the gods sent me a dream. Since the days of the Clœlius who made the water flow, when our Alba was razed, and our fathers were transplanted to this Cœlian hill, and the Clœlii became a Roman house,—once again, thou knowest, our name has had a high place in the story of old Rome.

“When Lars Porsenna, the Etruscan king, with his armies on the Janiculum, had driven the Romans to submit, and to send him the ivory throne, and twenty hostages, boys and maidens of the noblest blood, a virgin, Clœlia, was among them. She swam back through

the river, escaping the foe, leading the other girls, and fled safely to Rome. But to the Romans, our fathers, the faith of oaths was dearer than life, or things dearer than life, and they sent the maidens back. Noble deeds breed nobler. Porsenna the king honoured the maiden, and honoured the Roman fidelity, and sent her back to Rome with some of the hostages as the fruit of her courage, bidding her choose which she would. The girl Clœlia had a mother's heart in her, as all good women have, and she had pity on the helpless little ones, and chose them. So the king gave her a horse with royal trappings, and she rode home to the city Rome. A fair sight it must have been to our fathers to see the young maiden coming back as a conqueror, on the king's horse, with the little children she had rescued clustering around her. Her people would not have the beautiful vision fade away. They made her a statue, and there it stands to this day in the Sacred Way. The Sacred Processions pass by it, and the triumphs, as yesterday—by the statue of Clœlia, the maiden who rescued the captive children, seated on the horse Lars Porsenna gave her.

“There are many lonely hours in the temple, little sister; the dreams, and the toys, and the decorations of other maidens are not for us. And often as I sat weaving the sacred veils for the shrine, or in the night, I have pictured to myself those two, of our blood, who belonged to our house of old, until last night, through the golden gates, the gods sent me a dream.

“Clœlia, the brave maiden, came to me as I slept—not on horseback, as the princely heroine, but clad in a plain white stole, with a little child clinging to each hand—and she said to me,—

“‘Clœlia, my sister, Vestal, thou shalt be as the stream our father brought from Alba, the White City on the hills. Thy life shall be a sacred stream, flowing for the service of the gods and of Rome. To-morrow thy days flow forth into the sunshine, from the cool shadow of the rock arches, where they have been kept pure. Forth into the sunshine, on through the City Rome. They may make thee no statue in the Sacred Way; thou mayst never hear the praise of the people, nor feel the fond clinging of the children thou art saving. But what recks that? Statues crumble to dust, and the praise of the people is a breath. The work is real, and thou wilt do it. Thou wilt keep the sacred charge for Rome.’”

The maiden ceased. Her pitcher was overflowing: she stooped to take it up, and go her way. But first she clasped the poor child to her heart.

“Rejoice with me, little sister,” she said, “for my beautiful dream has come true. To-day I begin the service of Vesta and of Rome. This morning I have come hither to fetch fresh water to sprinkle on her shrine; for no water save pure from the heart of mother Earth must touch the altar of the Sacred Fire. I would not draw it to-day from the ancient grotto of Egeria on the

slopes below. They have imprisoned the fountain, and shut it out from the sunlight under heavy porticoes. Moreover, Jews dwell around it—the people who are said to hate all men—and I would not have an evil eye on me to-day. Wherefore I have come hither to the little rock-spring in our old garden, where I used to play when I was a little child. I hoped, too, to see thee. Rejoice with me, little sister. To-day I begin the sacred priesthood. To-day my life flows forth from the shadow of the rock arches into the sunshine, to serve our Rome.”

“My beautiful, I do rejoice in thee!” the child replied. But then, turning away, and bursting into tears, she sobbed—“Oh, Clœlia Pulchra, my sister, ask thy gods to have some pity on me. To me they have given nothing beautiful or good. My mother is ashamed of me, and never walks out with me. My father is kind, and likes to hear me sing; but I am no joy to him, no joy to him nor to any. I am no sweet stream of life like thee; but only a marsh—a waste, unsightly, unwholesome marsh.”

The young priestess sat down on the mossy bank, and drew the child to her, tenderly caressing her, and smoothing the long tresses of her raven hair.

“Dear,” she said, “this is not like thee. Was I thoughtless to parade before thee a joy thou canst not share? Then it is thy love which led me away. I thought all mine was thine. What beauty or joy I have, was it not always thy joy?—thou whose heart is so much more beautiful and stronger than mine. And art not

thou a joy to me, as I to thee? Have I not delighted in thy wisdom and goodness, in all the wise things old Laon has taught thee, and in that great love of thine for me? Was I wrong to forget all but thy love, in thee, to-day?"

"Not wrong," sobbed the child, but more quietly. "Never wrong," she added, with a sudden light irradiating her face, "to trust my love; only wrong to trust my wisdom and my goodness."

Then, hiding her face and her heaving breast on her sister's heart—"Oh, Clœlia, my beautiful," she said, "I never found it all out till yesterday at the Triumph. I was pushed down and trodden on in the crowd, and must have been hurt, perhaps killed, if one of the captives, a young German, had not lifted me up in his fettered arms, and placed me on some steps by the wayside, as tenderly as a mother could. But when I looked up to thank him, I could see disgust struggling with a divine pity in his eyes; but he was beautiful as one of the Greek gods—as the sun-god, beautiful and strong. I would thou couldst see him. And the people were angry that the procession had been broken; and they called me a hunchback, a dwarf, and many hideous names. And all at once it flashed upon me that it is true, and why it is that my mother never takes me by her side to walk with her, and my father looks so sadly at me. Oh, Clœlia, my sister, I understand it all now! Would to Heaven the German boy had never rescued me, but that I had

been trampled under his feet and under the conqueror's chariot. To-day I should have been buried out of sight; away from the beautiful day, away from the scornful faces—out of sight, where only such misshapen things should be. They would have gathered my ashes tenderly, even mine; and my urn, even mine, would have been something the sun might shine on; and thou wouldst have come and wept over it, and yet been half glad that the poor, waste, hopeless life was over."

The Vestal had no hope wherewith to comfort the child—nothing but love. But love steals in to sorrowful hearts, when even hope cannot enter, but has to shine outside. She could only say,—

"I love thee, dear; and old Laon loves thee. Our mother and father would miss thee in the house, be sure! But Laon and I—what should we do if thou wert gone? Never make thine obsequies, and put thyself in the urn again, little sister. Thou wilt have to make mine with them."

And as the sisters sat clasped together, a warmth crept over the poor child's heart, and she looked up again in the beautiful face she loved so dearly, and smiled. And in that smile, on the wan, thin face, there was a beauty deeper than that of the perfect face she gazed on—the sacred spiritual beauty born of pain and self-forgetting love. The Vestal saw it, and understood it. Then she rose hastily, and said,—

"I may not linger a moment longer from the temple."

And, with another embrace, she took up her pitcher and sprang lightly away. But before she glided out of sight among the myrtles and ilexes, she turned back and said,—

“Sweet, there is a sacred fire, an altar of our goddess, on thy hearth, as well as on the hearth of Rome. Keep charge of that.”

At the garden door one of the lictors met her, whose office it was to guard the vestals when they walked through the streets, as a part of the sacred state and magistracy of Rome.

And so, in her white stole, with the fresh water from the spring in her two-handled pitcher, carefully held in both hands, she glided through the narrow footpaths among the gardens over the Coelian hill to the temple at the foot of the Palatine. The low light flamed through the vine leaves and the quivering olives on her, like the fire from a vestal shrine in heaven; and the dawn touched her white robe and the clustering curls of her brown hair with fond sisterly fingers as she went, an embodiment of the loveliest vision of that old Roman world, with pure womanly hands to keep the shrine of the goddess pure; to keep the sacred fire which was the light and shield of her people burning for ever; to make the hearth of every home an altar, by making the most sacred altar in the country a hearth-fire.

The day of the young priestess's first ministrations

passed away, and the night came for which she had longed, the night when first the sacred fire was committed to her keeping, for Rome, and every hearth in Rome.

At first, long after dark, the murmur of the great city kept surging round the temple, from the Palatine and Capitoline hills between which it stood, and from the Forum outside. Gradually the steady murmur died away. The great sea of life was becoming hushed, and only now and then some intermittent wave of sound broke against the silence. Revellers returning through the Forum to the palaces of the Palatine, or to the villas among the parks and gardens of the Pincian hill, or with noisier merriment to the crowded quarters on the low ground—merriment not seldom ending in conflicts.

At length these intermittent sounds also ceased, and the Forum outside became as empty and silent as the shrine within.

Still the young priestess watched on in the midst of a silence more solemn than any other—the silence in the midst of a great city—her heart full of the old Roman ideal of duty, and of the heroic legends of her race. And the silence bathed and flowed around her spirit like a sea of still pure waters, as she sat or knelt beside the altar, from time to time feeding the sacred fire, or throwing frankincense upon it, whilst the flames flickered on her white stole, and lit up the purple border of her sacrificial veil.

Through the open roof of the temple, open as the

impluvium of every Roman house, the stars looked down on her, slowly entering and leaving one by one the little space of sky above her.

Her heart was full of glad and innocent visions. "I am only doing what every Roman matron does for her home," she thought; "simple, humble, household work. This temple is only a hearth, open to the sky as every Roman house. But I am doing it for Rome, and every hearth in Rome, awake, serving all, while they rest on sleeping, and know not of me."

Then gazing up through the clear depths of the night to the stars, she wondered if the stars also were hearth-fires, fed by pure divine hands, and by loving hearts, loving and caring for those who knew not. The whole world seemed to her an altar for the sacred fire.

The hearth-fire she guarded and fed so carefully was linked on one side with the stars, and on the other with the humblest hearth in Rome.

So the maiden did her sacred woman's work for her people, and kept the little island of purity given to her charge in the midst of the great corrupt city.

Only one shadow lay on her heart, the shadow of her little sister's blighted life. But this fell heavily. For through that one irremediable wrong, the shadow of all the irremediable wrong and pain in the world laid its burden on her heart. A burden which her priesthood would not lighten.

So, from the mystery of pain and sorrow, which she

could not relieve, or penetrate, she turned away to the sacred fire her heart and hands might help to keep burning.

She ministered in the temple, a beautiful type, and a living witness to the sacred aspirations of better days, aspirations after purity which all the corruption around could not stifle, powerless as they were to purify.

Until again the dawn broke—and the great tumult of life began to surge around the sanctuary—in the city where the family had ceased to be sacred, where the people had become an idle populace of paupers living on the imperial dole of corn, and the Senate a shadowy company of courtiers living on the imperial smiles ; where work was ignominious, and murder an amusement ; and there were no gods but Money and Tiberius Cæsar

She ministered alone within, clothed in white raiment, keeping the sacred eternal fire ; whilst outside revelled the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations, with her merchandise of gold and silver, wrung from tortured provinces, her cinnamon and odours, her fine flour and wheat, her slaves outnumbering her citizens, her traffic in the “bodies and souls of men.”

The loveliest type of the purest aspirations of that old perishing world.

* . * * * *

But while the vestals kept vigil in the temple for Rome, through many a long night on the lonely hills of Syria

vigil was being kept for the world, all night, in prayer to God.

One Altar was in the world on which burned the sacred eternal fire of unquenchable redeeming love, the sacred fire linked with heaven and with every hearth on earth ; a fire not of mere aspiration, powerless to keep anything pure but itself, but of redemption, which was to purify the world by consuming the heart in which it glowed.

A Priesthood had begun, not only tender to sympathize, but strong to save, able to bear the great burden of the world and take it away, and to change the irrevocable wrong from curse into blessing.

But the virgins at their vestal vigils knew not of it.

Nor of the great multitude clothed in white robes, whom the blood of that heart was to redeem and cleanse, that they also might be altars from which, day and night, the fragrance of incense and the flames of the sacred eternal fire might go up to heaven.





CHAPTER V.

OLD Laon, the Greek slave, sat on the steps of the Temple of Vesta, looking down on the Forum, while his young mistress, Clœlia, the deformed child, was within the sacred precincts with her sister Clœlia Pulchra, the Vestal.

It was early in the morning. The sellers of fruit and vegetables, just come in from the country with their baskets on their heads, or with their laden asses, were loudly crying their wares, or bargaining with the slaves of the great households, and with the poorer citizens themselves.

Time was a plentiful commodity in Rome just then. Commerce being from of old despised by the burghers as only fit for freedmen, and manual work by all Romans as only fit for slaves, whilst artistic work was chiefly the prerogative of Greeks, and the work of government was entirely undertaken by the Emperor, there was abundant leisure for conversation. There were also abundant opportunities for cultivating it among a people of whom the greater number were crowded into a mass of tall

houses intersected by narrow winding alleys, compared with which the most densely peopled dwellings of our modern cities would seem spacious, so that their days had to be spent together, in the open air.

Old Laon sat and watched with an amused face the various eager groups forming and breaking around him, until the crowd became so dense that all grouping was merged in the confused multitude.

From the Patrician Homes, large or small, detached in the midst of pleasant old gardens and shrubberies, on the hills traversed by no vulgar public roads, but only by steps and narrow foot-paths winding among the green slopes and terraces, came slaves for early purchases, and occasionally some nobleman, followed by a troop of clients.

From the Islands of towering houses, on the low ground and on the ledges of the hills, with their tangled jungle of human life, trooping down the outside staircases, and through the narrow lanes, often roofed over by balconies, came the multitudes of the Roman people.

To these their houses were mere sleeping-places. The Forum, the Circus, the Amphitheatre, or the Baths were for them not merely places of amusement, but living-rooms, parlours, talking-places, meeting-places, and resting-places.

The talk of the lips, therefore, was the great business of Rome. And talk of the lips most strictly it behoved

to be, essentially calculated to lead to nothing. Any touching on deeper things had been made especially perilous in the days of Tiberius by the renewed law of Treason, which ruled that the sacred majesty of the Emperor might be wounded by a word. By the law of treason, and by the encouragement of informers to the length of making them the most real officers of state. Conversation, therefore, must be of the lightest kind; light as the tread on the thinnest lava-crust over a recent eruption; and the great majority of freemen had little to do but to talk.

Books, for the people, did not exist, and by the wealthy, and even by the learned, were little used. All the talking now done through countless printing-offices, had then to be done through Roman lungs. Authors read their own compositions, and the opinion of the public came to them, not through reviews, or through the disappearance of editions, but through the hush or the acclamations of their listeners.

Thus, on that May morning, A.D. 17, it may be imagined what a tumult of tongues there was around old Laon in the Forum, when all Rome awoke once more to talk.

And meanwhile, from the hills all around, the silent guardian temples looked down on the eager, noisy throng, crowning the heights with long lines of marble porticoes glowing in the morning sun.

Laon had many acquaintances among all classes.

From time to time one and another branched off from the eager crowd to exchange words with him.

First came Damaris, an old slave of Clœlius Tullus, a fellow-slave with him. She seated herself beside him, laying down her heavy basket with a groan.

“You seem oppressed, my fair compatriot.”

“Compatriot! Thou, a mere Antiochene, a Macedonian, contaminated with Syrian blood and manners, and I an Athenian!”

“It is true I have Syrian blood in my veins, sweet Damaris. It is that which makes me so gracious and amiable. Had I been only a descendant of the race which conquered for Alexander, life might have been as hard for me as it seems to be for thee. Thanks to my Syrian mother, and my philosophy, I can bend, and so escape many a blow which thy less pliable nature receives and resents. The heroic firmness was good for heroic days, but the new philosophy suits these. It is a pity, Damaris, thou wouldst never be instructed by me in philosophy.”

“I would not give a rotten fig for thy philosophy. What would thy philosophy do for thee in preparing for a supper-party like this, that we are toiling about to-day? Nothing is so imbittering as the lot of the slaves of these poor patricians.”

“Excuse me, rich freedmen are worse masters.”

“It may be. But at any rate they do not stint your oil and salt. My mistress grows sourer and stingier every

day. As grasping as a usurer, and as proud as the Empress-mother. All because one ancestor dug a fine ditch some hundreds of years ago, and another had an equestrian statue made to her, which still stands in the Sacred Way. A choice statue, doubtless, made by these Romans hundreds of years ago! when now, after all they have learned of us, my son Callias says not one of them in a thousand can tell a head by Praxiteles from one by a stone-mason. A good thing if the Clœlii, and their statues, were all buried in the old Clœlian ditch."

"Softly, my good Damaris. Say what you like about their statues. Their ditches are irreproachable. These Latins made unexceptionable ditches. And as to statues, let us remember your Athenians did not agree so well with their Praxiteles while they had him. Even they would have spoiled his statues if he had obeyed them."

"Well, we may let Praxiteles alone. My son Callias has had an order for a statue from a great Syrian prince, Herod Antipas. He is building a palace in a new city he has founded by a Syrian lake, called Tiberias after the Emperor. These provincials pay well. The price will buy my son's freedom, and then he will work for mine. And the noble house of Clœlius may make their own ditches and suppers to the end of time, without my aid."

"You expect great guests?"

"Yes, imperial, for aught I know; and I know not what fare, and Clœlia Tulla is come herself to bargain about the provisions. She would trust none of us. There

are to be thrushes, and dormice, and flamingoes' tongues, and I know not what. Imagine how our rations will be stinted for weeks to come ! And imagine how the poor child you call Diodora suffers. The master is wise, and keeps out of the way at the *Campus Martius* or the Amphitheatre. At us fly pins and sticks, or anything that comes to hand. But we can often wriggle away and avoid them. Happily the gods have made Anger blind. But that poor child ! The heart is not so easily guarded as the head. And sarcasms are worse than pins. Better for her if you had not rescued her. Better she had perished when they cast her out, a helpless babe, to die in the streets."

"Better altogether, Damaris, if we had not these inconvenient, irregular things called hearts. We should make far better working machines. The world would go quite smoothly, like the stars ; Philosophy would find half her work done ; and there would be no history to write.

"Well," he continued, "that act of folly of mine had well-nigh been undone this week, had it not been for another of those irregular impulses of hearts. The child would have been trampled to death in the Triumph if a young German captive had not lifted her up and placed her in safety, fettered as he was. Poor fellow, he caught some hard blows for his pains. I would fain see him again. There was something in his high, bold bearing which made me think bondage is like to prove bitter to him."

"But, ah!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "who is that tall lad, with fair long hair, in a dark slave's dress, carrying a load of torchwood?"

Whilst he spoke he had been steadily scanning the crowd, as if in search of some one. At that moment he started from the steps and made a dart into the thick of the throng.

Siward recognized at once the kindly eyes in perpetual debate with the sarcastic mouth. But he would not turn aside, as Laon asked him, for a morning draught of wine. He had been given a task, and he must hasten to do it.

"You are new at the work," said the old man, as he walked beside him. "No slave thinks of going straight on a message. See them hovering around the cook shops and the wine shops, stuffing the fruit into their mouths—jesting with the flower-girls from the Campagna. It costs them nothing. Their time is their masters'; and it is for the master, doubtless, they are making these hard bargains! and what harm if they share the profits?"

"I *am* new at the work," said the boy, not in a very gracious voice. "They have made me a slave. But I will not make myself a thief and a liar, nor as one of these lazy, gluttonous swine."

"Not so bad for a young barbarian," chuckled old Laon. "Not so bad, if it had been declaimed at the Porch. Master thyself, and no man can make thee a slave."

"Boy," he continued, "the load hurts thee; thou art lame."

The boy flushed; for a moment he was silent. But the kindness of the tone and of the eyes into which he glanced unlocked his heart.

"My shoulders are bruised; but the load had to be carried, and I am doing it as well as I can."

"If thou hast to be beaten, it shall not be for doing wrong, eh?" said the old man.

"I have not been beaten by any one who had a right," said the boy. "I have only been knocked down and kicked about by a base herd of slaves."

The old man shook his head, and laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"Gently, my son, gently," he said. "Slaves will not stand being called names by any but their masters."

"I did not call them names," Siward replied; "they called me names."

"For instance?"

"They asked me of my parentage. And when I said that my father was noble, and that he worked at his own smithy, they called me 'the patrician blacksmith,' and jeered at my father and my mother, until I had no answer left but to knock one of them down."

"Not wise," said the old man drily; "heroic, but not wise. A blacksmith's, my son, is not considered a patrician employment in Rome. It was a misunderstanding. The misfortune is this: Your people are living in a different era from these Romans. You are still in your heroic age. We also, Greeks and Latins, have had this;

—one of the Homeric gods was a blacksmith, or at least a smith. He made thrones and spears for the gods and the goddesses. And they thought a great deal of him. But that is a long while ago. We Greeks and Latins have long since outlived our heroic age. And blacksmiths are no longer honoured amongst us as they should be. Nor, indeed, workmen of any kind. The Roman people decline to work. Why should they? Tiberius Cæsar gives them their daily bread—Alexandrian corn, and salt, and the Games. The Roman patricians scorn commerce. Naturally. They can plunder provinces.”

The boy looked up, half doubting whether he was being again made a butt of. The wits of these southern people were so sharp, that a straightforward German did not perceive he was hit by their jests, until he saw every one around laughing at his discomfiture.

“ I speak with feeling, my son,” Laon resumed ; “ for I also am a blacksmith, or at least a smith. And I am far from being honoured as I ought to be. I am also a slave. Not ten days since my mistress was not pleased with a brooch I had mended for her, and she called me an ugly, lame, old fool, and scratched my face with the pin. It was not a glorious wound, rather ignominious. But it hurt considerably. You may still see the scar. And the name she called me was not pleasant. Not the more so because it is true. You see I am old, and lame, and not beautiful. But then it was easier for me to bear than for

you, because I was not brought up in the heroic age. Therefore, what seems to you high tragedy, is to me simply uncomfortable comedy. I feel the scratch, and the indignity ; but I smile."

"You are a smith!" rejoined Siward, going straight to the only point in Laon's discourse that was quite clear to him. "I wish I could learn of you. The Roman weapons are better than ours. My father always said so."

"You wish you could learn of me? It might perhaps be managed. You would be more valuable to your master if you knew a trade. And if that would be an inducement, I would teach you for nothing. Clœlius Tullus would, I think, permit this as a reward to the boy who rescued his daughter. Not that we must presume much on that ; for I once did the same ! Boy, you have a strong arm, and you used it well that day."

"Poor deformed child!" said the boy ; "she did not look as if she needed anything more to make her life miserable. Was she hurt?"

"Only by the rough words of the crowd. They spoke uncivilly of her deformity. She did not like being called names, any more than you or I. None the more because they are true. She is not well shaped ; and I am lame, and hardly to be called beautiful ; and you are the son of a blacksmith, and also noble. We must try not to mind if people call us so."

For the first time Siward caught the meaning of the

old man, and smiled, a broad, frank, German smile—and then he even laughed, a hearty German laugh.

“I have been a fool to mind them,” he said. “If you can get me into your smithy, I will work for you as if it were at my father’s forge in the Lippe valley. And you will make me wise as you are.”

“Nay,” said the old man. “Wait a little. I did not throw my wisdom into the bargain!”

They had reached the door of the palace of Germanicus.

Laon turned back to wait for his young mistress.

And Siward said to Siguna, when he met her next,—

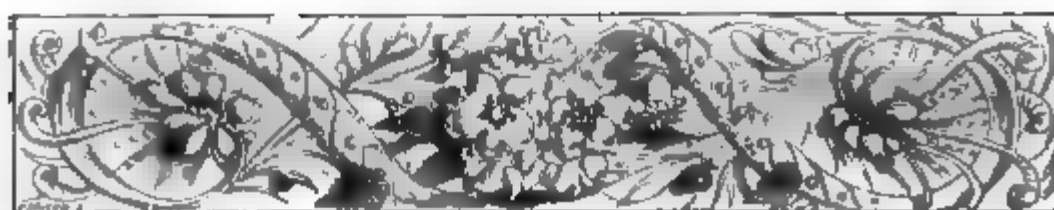
“Mother, I have found an old man who seems as wise as Odin’s ravens. He says he will teach me to make swords. For Herman!” he added in a low voice—“for Herman, and our people in the forests! They make good spears and swords at Rome.”

Her heart bounded to see something of the old light on his frank brow again.

And little Hilda stretched out her arms to him, as if she felt the sunshine on his face, and unfolded in it like a flower.

And for the time, in all the palace of the brave Germanicus and his wife, with their beautiful children (one of them the boy Caligula, darling of the Roman soldiers), there were no hearts lighter than those of the German captives.

For Hope had lit up the world for them. And in all the empire of Tiberius Cæsar Hope had little free space to breathe in.



CHAPTER VI.

TENDERLY the old man piloted the child from the Temple of Vesta through the Forum, and amongst the crowds of laden waggons, chariots with four horses abreast, men crying their wares in all keys and dialects, which thronged the Sacred Way, in a city which counted its population by hundreds of thousands, and had only two carriage-roads, and scarcely any shops.

At length they had skirted the Palatine, and branched off into a footpath among the gardens on the Coelian, slowly climbing the steps together.

"I have seen thy deliverer, Clœlia Diodora," said Laon. "He also finds life not altogether smooth, like so many,—from the multitudes of the Roman people, who exist on the crust and salt, and the Games, to the Emperor, who gives them all things."

She laid her hand on his arm, looking up into his face with eyes that flashed almost fiercely.

"Stop, Laon, stop!" she said. "I have been with Clœlia the Vestal, my sister, and that is like being among

the gods on Olympus. I have been drinking in her beauty and goodness like nectar. Do not make everything gray to me. I will not have it. I will sit in my darkness, and call it darkness. But I will look out on the light, and see it glow in the sky, and burn on the hills, and dance on the waters. And I will not have the light called darkness to please me, because I am not in it."

Then gently she added,—

"I will sit in the darkness, as in the old days, when I did not know I was a blot on the light, in the little dark room behind thy workshop—looking through the lattice at thee, and watching the sparks from thy fire, or listening to the wise talk. Oh, Laon," she concluded, with a sudden change, impulsive and intense as she was, "if I could only sit there always, and dress thy olives and onions, and cook thy fish for thee, as I used to hope I should!"

'Child, I did it for the best,' he said. "Could I withhold thee from thy mother, when I heard her moaning and wailing for but one of her dead children? I thought that nurture and culture better than I could give might yet restore thee."

"Was I like what I am, when thou didst first find me?" she asked in a low voice, after a pause, "when I lay, a little, helpless, wailing babe by the wayside, abandoned of all, and thou savedst me?"

"Nay! I know little what thou wert like," he said. "It

may be thy little tender frame got some twist or hurt when they cast thee out. I was not learned in the looks or ways of babes. Thy cry went to my heart."

"And afterwards—was I like other children, at first?"

"How can I tell?" he said. "I knew not the ways of other children. To me thou wert not like any other child—with thy innocent, fondling ways, and thy sweet prattle, and thy voice, which always will be the sweetest voice in the world, and the wonderful wisdom of thy questions, searching into depths Plato could not have fathomed. To me thou wert as the sweet childhood of the world—as the golden age of Greece come back again—as a lyric springing up ever fresh. All the fair legends of the gods lived again in thee. Thou wert to me as an image dropped down from Jupiter on my poor hearth to make it as glad as Olympus. And I called thee Diodora. What did it matter to me what others thought thee like? Thou wert, and art, my god-given. Images dropped down from heaven are seldom beautiful. Diana of the Ephesians is a monster, ending in a shapeless piece of wood. The olive-wood Athena of the Parthenon had little of the beauty of the golden and ivory statue of Phidias. What did that matter? It had come down from heaven, and was the most sacred treasure of Athens."

"It was hard then to thee to give me up?"

"It was like taking the sun out of heaven. But I loved thee. And I thought that I should see my darling the

delight of a Patrician house, one day wearing the bride's saffron veil."

"Hush, hush! Laon!"

He looked down at the drooping, quivering eyelids and the flushed face. And he saw she was no longer a mere child.

"Laon," she said, "what if I could come back to thee again. My mother has seen that German boy thou callest my deliverer. She and my father think they might adopt him. And then, perhaps, I might come back to the little room behind the workshop with thee. I should leave little lack of sunshine in my home, and it would be so sweet to get into the shade again with thee. And I could live between thy house and my sister's temple. Perhaps, as she says, make thy house something of a temple!"

"Would the lad consent to this?" Laon asked.

"His mother says he would not; that he is a German, and will not be made a Roman; and that he added some terrible things about women who expose their babes to die. He called them murderesses, Laon. It seems the Germans think this a crime. But think of all that can be suffered by a slave: the terrible thong knotted with sharp stones, the *furca*, and the degradation, and"—she added in a low voice—"the *cross*! Surely he cannot refuse such a change."

"I do not know," Laon answered, musingly. "I do not know. That boy could endure much. And I think he

has learned there are things worse than pain or death. But he is coming to me to learn my trade, Diodora, and I will see."

"Thou wouldst not persuade him to anything against his good, for my sake, Laon?" she said, timidly. "I have never liked to burden thee with complaints. But this palace is no home to me."

"They are not cruel to thee, little one?" he said, in a low voice.

"No one means to be," she said; "but my mother, you know, was beautiful, and people say my face is, or would have been, like hers, and that displeases her. And her delight is in jewels and in the toilette; and sometimes, when Damaris cannot make her quite as fair as she used to be, she is angry with the cosmetics and with Damaris, and when she is angry the sight of me seems to vex her past endurance.

"But I am not angry with her," continued the child, "for I think the truth is she is angry with herself. If I had done what she has with me, I should have hated myself, and hated every one."

"Reason enough," murmured Laon, gutturally.

"And my father likes me to sit in the shadow and sing him lays of old Rome, especially of our house, of the Clœlius who made the aqueduct, and the Clœlia who saved the children, or of Virginia and the Tarquins, or of Egeria the nymph, whose grotto was in the slopes of the hill below us. My father might miss me; and yet, I

think, not much. For I heard him say bitterly, one day, I was a symbol of what Rome had fallen to,—the countenance and the voice of the old Rome left, but the whole body of the people shapeless, helpless, a ruin and a disgrace.”

“It would be sweet to thee to have thy dwelling again with me,” said the old man, musing, “in the little dark room behind the workshop.”

They had reached the garden door on the southern slopes of the hill, and suddenly as it opened, and they entered from the shadow of the narrow pathway between the walls, all the wealth of the May sunshine burst on them, lighting up the beds of purple and saffron crocuses, the broad reaches of the Campagna, and beyond, the purple and saffron Alban hills. “Sweeter to thee than this?” he asked.

“What is all the sunshine outside to being a little bit of sunshine myself to thee, Laon?”

“Well, I did my best for thee,” said the old man, in a husky voice; “but perhaps thou art right, Diodora, my god-given. Perhaps thou art right. In our Greece, of old, we might have found thee a place of honour. Thou shouldst have sung divine songs for all time like Sappho or Erinna. We would have found thee a place to make sunshine in.”

“Would you?” said the girl doubtingly. “Sappho was beautiful, yet she died of love. Erinna was chained to her spinning wheel, and faded away early, being I sup-

pose beloved of the gods. Have you not told me it was not the matrons and the good women who were eloquent and wise in your Greece? And," she added with a shudder, "I always think of Thersites. Lameness and deformity were not made easy for him among your heroes! I think you would have found little place for anything not beautiful in your Greece, Laon, here, below, or on Olympus. You naturally think the ugly must be wicked and malignant. And perhaps they are," she concluded very sorrowfully; "perhaps they are, or become so. It is hard to be hated and not to hate."

"Poor child," Laon replied in a tremulous voice; "poor child. Perhaps I did ill for thee. Life is bitter enough for all; more than to most for thee. It were well to have as little as might be of it. If only we were wise, and were not so foolish as to love and miss each other. And if one knew a little more surely what death is!"





CHAPTER VII.

SIWARD was permitted to learn Laon's trade. And a great friendship sprang up between the two.

Once Laon had attempted to suggest that the boy should consent to be adopted into the Clœlian house.

But the storm that met the proposition prevented his ever making it again.

"My name is Siward, son of Olave and Siguna, a freeman and freewoman, good and brave and free, and German. Shall I submit to the infamy of being called the son of a murderer and a murderess? Worst of all murderers, who cast out their own helpless babe to perish!"

"Strong words, my son," said the old man, "strong words. Have a care, lad; words are held crimes now in Rome. They are always weapons sharper and more perilous than any I can make. Keep them in a sheath, my son."

But he pursued the subject no further. "Strange gifts have come to me in this beggarly little house," he would say. "First the child Diodora, and then thou. Child-

hood and youth. The golden age and the heroic age always recurring in this decrepit old world. The leaves are always young, even when the trees are hollow with decay. What must it have been when the world itself was young?"

"But our world is not old," Siward would say; "our world in the forests is young."

And strange interchanges of legend passed between them.

Laon told the beautiful Greek stories of courage and endurance, of dragons and deliverers, of Siren voices resisted and the Golden Fleece won, of labours persevered in to the death, of noble battle, of the joy of hard-won victory, and the nobleness higher even than that of the victors in the vanquished,—all the old legends moulded into perfect form and music through Greek art.

And in return Siward gave—shapeless as the mists on his northern hills, and tangled as the paths through his northern forests, not yet fashioned even as far into definite shape as we see them—old Teuton legends of the mighty Æsir and their golden Asgard; of Loki, the Malignant, who penetrated even into the city of the gods, and the gods who could scarce penetrate into the city of Death, still less rescue any thence, even Baldur the Beautiful, the beloved of gods, and men, and all creatures; of Siguna, who loved her lost Loki, fallen and black-hearted as he was, when the gods and all creatures hated him, and kept off the poison from him, age after age; of the

dark unknown worlds, and the dark unknown ages that encircle everywhere the little world and little life of man ; of the cloud-dwellings and the fire-abysses ; of the storm and chaos in which all things began, and the chaotic storm and wrath in which all things, even Asgard and the gods, must end ; of the Tree of Life, evermore gnawed at the root by serpents, and evermore fed at the root by waters brought by pure virgin hands from the living springs ; of Odin, with the raven, foreseeing the wreck he could not avert ; and through all of a veiled light afar off, mystical and sweet ; of Baldur, the beloved, the divine, whom all the creatures loved and wept, buried deep in the dark dwellings of Death, unable to break through them, unable to irradiate the darkness, yet never assimilated to the darkness ; living in the heart of the death-kingdom ; always a dim unquenchable hope glowing far down in the depths.

Old Laon listened, and responded with the great tragedy of the Bound Titan, who brought the sacred fire to man ; of the stirrings of soft wings around his agony, of the lament of the torturers, of the dim glimpses of a far-off hope, of some deliverer to be born in the after ages out of much anguish.

“Strange !” he would murmur, “strange ! Barbarians as these are, there is something in them that vibrates to our music as these Latins never can.

“These Romans are ever the centre of the world to themselves, and see nothing above their own stature. Of

our Homeric legends what can they make but a pious Æneas, from whom can be traced in lineal succession the pedigree of a divine Augustus? No unanswerable riddles in the world for them; no cloud-dwellings and fire-abysses! A very solid, definite world this to them, requiring solidly-built ditches to drain it, and well-made roads to cross it,—which they make. In fact, they never had more than one god whom they really worshipped. The divinity of the Romans in their noble days was Rome. Their Jove was Jupiter the Capitoline, not Zeus the Olympian. The lesser gods were all supremely occupied, not with each other, but with Rome. Nothing could tempt the god Boundary to desert his ancient home on the Capitoline, or to recede from the utmost pillar Roman ambition set up to him at the furthest limit of conquest. Janus threw open his temple-gates and poured thence a sudden flood, sweeping back the enemies of Rome; wherefore in time of war his temple is ever open. They had temples to Roman virtues (when there were Roman virtues)—to Industry, to Fidelity, to Concord, to Hope, Hope in the destiny of Rome, which once the whole people thanked a defeated general for not abandoning. Each house had its lords and protectors, its Lares and Penates, guardians of Roman hearths. Their priests were no secluded worshippers of the Invisible, but ministers of state, augurs of battle, sacrificing, and searching the will of the gods by auguries, for Rome.

"In the Temple of Vesta the virgin priestesses guard the Sacred Fire for Rome; and in the camp or on the battle-field the Roman eagles must be guarded as religiously as the Sacred Fire. In their noblest legends, brother, sister, wife, husband, life were sacrificed unhesitatingly for Rome, for the republic, the city, the country. Patriotism was the ancient religion of Rome."

"And now?" said Siward.

"There is no Rome now; so say the noblest Romans. The Roman senate is a name. The Roman people a mob of idle beggars. The old temples stand, and incense is burned on every shrine. But still the Romans have only one god whom they really worship."

"Who is he?" said the boy eagerly. "He must be strong."

"Cæsar!" said the old man in a low voice.

"I have seen a temple to Julius Cæsar on the summit of the Velia, fronting the Temple of Jove in the Capitol," said Siward.

"Yes; he was the first. But he is only adored now for the sake of the third; the living Cæsar. Tiberius Cæsar is the real god of Rome. Cæsar is no shadowy dweller among the Dii Manes, in Elysium, or anywhere else. He must be terrible and living. He must be able to give the Romans daily bread to eat, and provinces to plunder."

"He has no temples?" asked Siward; "I have seen none."

"No," replied Laon. "His worshippers have entreated permission to erect him altars and temples; but he will not suffer it. Strange to say, this divine man, whom all men worship, does not worship himself. He does not believe himself divine. But this religion has no need of temples. There are no mysteries in it. Its rites are practical as the Roman roads and ditches. The Temple of Cæsar is the world. His symbols are in every man's hand. Shall I show you one?"

The old man took out a coin with the head of Tiberius.

"Patriotism was the religion of the old Romans," he concluded. "The religion of modern Romans is the service of Cæsar. Of the living Cæsar," he concluded, emphatically; "since even the Cæsars continue not, by reason of Death."

"Death cannot be kept even out of Asgard!" observed the boy. "But tell me, Laon, what kind of a man is Cæsar? For after all he is a man. I have seen him talking with our Cæsar Germanicus like other men. I have stood mute and motionless for hours through the night, waiting on the table behind him at a feast. And I have seen him eat. I have seen his slaves cut up the meat for him into small morsels, after the fashion of patricians here, and of babes among us. He needs to eat, like other men, and to sleep. But this also do they do in Valhalla. The monstrous boar which the heroes eat by night is put together by day, out of the bones, to be eaten to-morrow. But Odin eats not. Wine is meat and

drink to him. Which of our gods, or of yours, is Tiberius like? Is he like Odin, or Baldur? Or like Apollo, who seems the great god of your Greece—the god with the lyre, warrior and poet and king and sea-god, who killed the dragon?”

Laon's eyes twinkled with a strange light as he glanced round to see no one was near.

“It is not always safe to speak one's mind of the gods. They are said to use lightnings instead of swords. And this god, if he has no lightnings, has axes and rods, which, to our mortal eyes, hit with more precision and certainty. There is a crime called the Wounded Majesty of Cæsar. A disrespectful word spoken against Cæsar is the blasphemy of this Roman religion. For this blasphemy there is no expiation.—Which of the gods is Tiberius Cæsar like?” he continued, recurring to Siward's question. “Did you not tell me your Odin had a raven which brings him tidings of all that is said and done throughout the world? Tiberius Cæsar has a countless number of such ravens. They are called Informers. They wear no livery of state. But they are the chief police of the state. They watch by every hearth. You might be such a raven for Germanicus, if you wished. It is said the young Cæsar does not too well love the reigning Cæsar. It is certain Tiberius Cæsar hates Germanicus. You might hear one day some careless word, and report it to the Emperor. And for that word you might earn freedom, riches, honours—honours such as Cæsar can give.”

“I earn such honours as those!” exclaimed Siward. “In Germany we call that treachery. Does Tiberius choose to be served thus? This is not like Baldur or any noble being. Can any love him and serve him freely?”

“I certainly never heard that any one loved Tiberius Cæsar, unless it be the Empress-mother, who won the sceptre for him,” said Laon; “or that any served him freely. Nor did I ever hear that he loved any one, or sought that any one should love him or serve him freely. I myself once heard him say in Greek as he came out of the Senate, ‘*How fit these men are for slavery.*’ But he can pay; and he can slay. What could his worshippers want more? For what is this love you speak of? Are your gods or ours always or altogether good, that they should be loved? At least what we should call good. Are morals the same for gods and men? Is Tiberius Cæsar to be judged as you and I should judge ourselves? The gods are powerful. Cæsar is powerful. Is not that enough?”

“Is he the god of all Romans?” asked Siward, perplexed.

“Some Romans think they worship *our* gods—the gods of Greece,” said Laon; “as they think they understand the poets and philosophers of Greece, and even construct Greek poetry and philosophy themselves. They profess great reverence for our Athens, and like to be considered fellow-citizens and fellow-worshippers with the Greeks who

made the beautiful old statues and built the beautiful old temples. I doubt, however, if the tribes of men *can* worship each other's gods. They borrow the names. But through all the Grecian draperies comes not the head of Zeus, the cloud-compeller, throned in majestic calm, but the strong soldier's face of the Capitoline Jove.

"Similarly, if you tried to adore our Apollo, your heart would see not the joyous Apollo, the radiant, the far-darting, with the lyre and silver bow, but Baldur your beautiful, with a divine sadness on his face, wept by all creatures, with the shadow of your clouds on his brow. But every religion has Lesser Gods. Among those of the Romans there is Juno Moneta, the Counsellor. She had her shrine of old on the Citadel of Rome, opposite the Capitol. It is now the Roman Mint. This temple is erected still in the citadel of many a heart. Money must ever be a god of nations and men, among whom the Temple of Hope is in ruins."

"The gods of men are diverse, my mother said, as their fathers and their dwellings. Let each keep to his own."

"Your mother is wise. But so think not the Romans. There is a restless searching among them hither and thither for new gods, especially among women. Rome is full of new temples and new rites, brought from the ends of the earth, from Egypt, from Persia. Some noble Roman matrons have even embraced a gloomy Syrian superstition peculiar to a tribe called Jews, a misan-

thropic race, who hate all other races of men—will not even eat with them, nor enter the temples, nor assist at game or race; and in their own sanctuaries have no symbol or sacred image, but an ancient book, which they kiss, and seem to listen to as if it were divine. Beyond this I know not that they have any other shrine, unless it be the shrine of the Mint goddess. Money-lenders many of them are, with a marvellous faculty for growing rich. What beauty or good there is in them, or in their worship, it is difficult to say. But women are capricious; and this worship of Cæsar does not seem to suit the hearts of women.”

Siward looked earnestly into Laon's face, as he was wont to do when perplexed with his words, to read the meaning in his eyes.

“Is Cæsar *your* god, Laon?” he asked abruptly

“I told you he had forbidden that men should worship him. Should I disobey the decree of Cæsar? He has no temple. How can I burn incense to him?”

“Laon,” said the boy, “in what temple do you burn incense?”

The old man paused a moment.

“In the nearest, my son,” he replied at length concisely. “Do not the immortals know that I am lame?”

Siward looked dissatisfied.

“What matters it,” Laon continued, “in what temple an old slave like Laon worships? Have my vows and

supplications brought down such divine favours on me, that any need seek to imitate them?"

"Laon," the boy replied, in his straightforward way, "your gods, I think, have given you the best gifts. They have made you patient and kind and wise, and strong in heart. I wish to know your gods."

"Boy," said the old man gravely, "you have scarcely yet needed the barber's skill. Shall I tell you in a moment all the secrets of seventy years? There is something we call Love of Wisdom, which, when old faiths die, may replace them perhaps with what they meant. But while the old faith lives, let it live. The meaning is there, if veiled. And if it make the life brave and pure, what can philosophy do more? Our wisest said, Destroy not the old legends; the truth is in them.

"But come," he added, turning the subject, "I will show you what the divine government of this Cæsar is like."

And he took from a drawer a cast from the cameo of the Apotheosis of Augustus. Siward looked at it long.

Above, the Emperor enthroned in easy majesty among the gods, beside the divine city Rome, with her crown of towers, himself placing on his own head the laurel crown. Around, Roman soldiers, chariots, and horses, triumphant men, a beautiful woman with the horn of Plenty, and happy children.

Below, the vanquished, prostrate, half-crushed, under

yokes, dragged by the hair, fettered, seeking to hide their faces in clasped hands. No appeal to Cæsar for them, nothing but to be trampled under his feet. To the vanquished, Woe!

The boy turned away.

He never forgot that this Woe reached down to slavery, and to the possibility of the death of the cross.

“No appeal for us to this god!” he murmured at length. “But in our north, Herman the Deliverer lives still. Our gods dwell in the north and look southward. When we pray we turn to the north.”

And he resumed his work at the metals with redoubled purpose.

The old man understood, but did not remonstrate. It was some time before either spoke again. Siward was earnestly bending over his work, so earnestly that he did not observe a soft footstep approach the door, until something of unusual light fell on him, and looking up suddenly he saw a young maiden standing before him. She stood, erect and radiant, entirely clothed in white, in marked contrast to the languishing, jewelled, perfumed women of her time. Not an ornament nor a jewel drew the eye from the stately grace of her figure or the delicate beauty of her face. There was no colour about her, except the golden glow on her brown hair and the soft flush of youth on the cheek; no sparkle except the beaming of her eyes, when at rare moments the long lashes were raised and she looked up.

Yet it seemed as if her presence brought the light of the open heavens into the dark workshop. The whiteness of her stole was not like any whiteness he had seen on earth, Siward thought. It was like the radiance of clouds in the clearest moonlight, or of swans basking in the sunshine among the green shadows of a river. And so with her movements. Like a cloud or a swan she had floated on his sight.

Instinctively he laid down his tools, as if in an imperial presence, and stood before her, but with eyes that did not venture to seek hers. He stood bathed in a heavenly light. Until she spoke; and the tones of the sweet, girlish voice seemed to wake him out of one bright dream into another. At first he comprehended nothing but the music of the tones. They were music—music such as he had never heard before. He no more thought of words than if he had been listening to some far-off melody of flutes across the waters, until old Laon's voice broke in on the vision.

She was speaking; and speaking of him.

"Clœlia the Vestal has come hither," Laon said, "to thank thee for rescuing Clœlia Diodora, her sister."

"Can I do anything for thee?—thou hast done well and bravely for us," she said, with a simple kindness. "The Vestals have some rights and special privileges. If by chance we meet a criminal on his way to execution, we can demand his pardon."

A great rush of hope came into the captive boy's heart,

and brought the power of manhood into his face. He raised his eyes, looked proudly into the pure, sweet face, and said calmly,—

“I am no criminal. I am no captive captured in fair fight. We were betrayed. We were born free. But, now, I am a slave in the household of Cæsar Germanicus.”

A cloud passed over her countenance.

“The house of the Cæsars is above all laws and rights,” she said. “Would it had been any one else!”

She stood with clasped hands, and eyes mournfully cast down. He would have given much to recall his words, and bring back the radiance to her face. At length he ventured to speak.

“Let not my evil chance darken thy heart, lady,” he said. “Others have won back freedom; and so will I, for me and mine. Liberty is better conquered than given.”

She looked up, and her face shone once more. There was a will in his words which made them prophetic.

“Brave words,” she said, “and true. If I can do anything to set thee free, I will. If not, thou wilt do it; and that will be better for thee.”

And with a smile, which to him was like a sacred augury of victory, she went out of the workshop; and he watched her glide, under the shadow of the balconies, down the narrow crowded lane. The way was made for her, he thought, among the throng, not by the lictor, but by her

own beauty. She passed through the throng like a sun-beam.

Siward returned to his work, and felt as if it had been consecrated by incense and sacrifice. It was not till after a long silence that he said,—

“Laon, *she* is no worshipper of Tiberius Cæsar, nor of the Mint goddess.”

“No,” said the old man; “she lives in a lovely vision—herself the loveliest part of it. Her religion is the religion of old Rome. Day and night she guards the Sacred Fire for her country, for Rome; and knows not that the Rome she spends her life for lives no more. The fire burns on the altar; but the divinity, the Patria, for whose sake it burns, is dust and ashes!”

So the weeks and months passed on for Siward. Not slowly, or altogether sadly. He felt each day the bracing sense of power gained; gained for what to him were the noblest ends. And meanwhile he was gaining unconsciously other powers higher than he could estimate. Stores of wisdom from the old civilization were penetrating his mind through the words of old Laon.

He was still in the dawn. Continually new fields of fact and thought were opening on him. Every day the world grew larger and wider to him, as the past of Greece and Rome and of the old kingdoms of the world came into the light before him.

Yet still he stood before the threshold of a home. The sacred world lay still for him in the home behind him, to

which he meant to return, with his mother and his sister, and make it beautiful with all the treasures of those new worlds.

Clœlia Diodora often came and sat in the little room behind the shop, and listened to the talk of the two in the workshop. And sometimes she sang, in her rich southern voice, lays and legends of old Rome.

He liked to listen. But no such magic came with the poor child's tones to his heart as with the lightest murmur of Clœlia the Vestal.

Only to the old man the poor deformed child remained dearest of all. Sometimes he would lay her small delicate hand on his forehead, with an Oriental sign of homage, and say,—

“Diodora, my god-given, thou and I are in disguise here. Princely, but no one knows us. What matters it? Does not our wise man say we are in prison here? Have we not heard a song few understand, and understood? But I too,” he repeated, quoting words well known to them both, “‘consider myself a fellow-servant with the swans, and sacred to the same god, who, when they must die, though they have been used to sing before, sing then more than ever.’ Read to me the dying song of that swan-like soul of our old Athens.

He had taught her the rare accomplishment—for a girl—of reading. And of all reading, he liked best to listen to the Phædo in her girlish tones, how “justice and goodness and beauty are something, and really exist;” and

“the soul, which is invisible, from the prison of the body goes to another place like itself—excellent, pure, and invisible.”

“That barbarian lad is brave and true, and loves to learn,” he said ; “but we have to lead him a little further before he can understand our swan’s singing.”

But on the heart of Clœlia the Vestal the shadows fell more frequently. She tried, but could not effect Siward’s liberation. As she fed the fires in the temple, the irremediable sorrows around her, of Clœlia her suffering sister, and of Siward the slave, and through them of the great suffering world, pressed closer and more heavily on her heart.

And with these, from time to time, came rumours of the wickedness of the city ; a stifling fear that the Rome whose sacred hearth-fire she kept was not the free-born Rome of old, but something very different—more like the city in the Apotheosis of Augustus, with stony stateliness trampling the oppressed world under her feet.

And with this fear, now and then, came lovely, innocent dreams of some hearth she might have kept bright and pure, and made a source of light and joy.

Every evening Siward passed by the palace of Tiberius Cæsar on the Palatine, and thought of the picture of the divine government of Augustus with a defiant heart.

“God of this wicked, cruel, idle, mocking Rome!” he

thought ; " but not of us, the sons of the North. For us lives Herman the Deliverer."

With this hope in him, the sarcasms of his fellow-slaves fell harmlessly. And with a strong, light heart, he went on to learn how to fashion the liberating sword.

In many ways he was right.

All power in heaven and on earth was indeed not given to Tiberius Cæsar.

One universal Empire was at hand ; but it was not his.

The Deliverer who could unbind the heavy burdens and bid the oppressed go free, was indeed on earth.

But it was not Herman.

The King who was to demand and receive the homage of the world, and overthrow the palaces of the Palatine and the temples of the Capitoline, through many patient years to come, was consecrating and ennobling the labour of the humblest workshop in the Suburra or the Vela-brum.

The kingdom of God was at hand.

But its foundations were being laid in the carpenter's workshop at Nazareth.





CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT fine fortune has the New Year brought thee?" said old Laon, looking from his work as Siward entered the workshop on New Year's Day, his honest face radiant with life and hope. "You look indeed like one of your happy Hyperboreans. Make the most of to-day by all means. Tiberius Cæsar has forbidden the New Year's presents to be continued beyond to-day. Boy, have they been making thee glad with honey-cakes, and figs, and dates; or what good news has cheered thee?"

"Nothing, but that Cæsar Germanicus is to leave this idle, miserable Rome, for his government in the East, and we go with him."

"Are thy happy fields then in the East? Ours were in the West, or beyond the North Wind. But, indeed, it matters little where. Anywhere but where we have been, or where we are."

"We are going first to thy Greece, Laon," said Siward.

"To *my* Greece? My Greece died and was buried long years ago; or rather was not buried, which is

worse. Dost thou not know that nations, like ourselves, die a thousand times before they are said to die? First the child dies, then the boy, then the man. At last old age must die, and with it we ourselves. So with Greece. First the gods died—that is, passed among the shades—then the heroes, then the men. Dost thou think to find Apollo in Greece, or Achilles, or the heroes of Thermopylæ, or the wise men of the Grove, of the Porch, or of the Garden, that thou rejoicest thus to quit old Laon and his workshop in the Suburra? As glad to go as to come. Like the rest, like the rest!”

Siward's countenance fell. He said little in reply, but settled down quietly to his work, knowing well by this time that the way to quiet his old friend's temper when ruffled was to let him have his grumble out. Moreover, when he put them to himself, he found Laon's questions rather unanswerable. It was not clear what good he expected from the change. A slave in the Palatine, he would be equally a slave in the Acropolis or on the Mediterranean. It was only clear that it would be a relief to escape from this Rome. This, and a vague hope of learning something which might bring him nearer freedom and Herman, were what had made him glad.

Old Laon did not recover all that day, and dismissed the boy early.

But the next morning, when Siward entered the workshop, he was greeted with a grim smile.

"I also am going to the East with Cæsar Germanicus," Laon said. "Not so easy to escape an old tyrant like me. Clœlius Tullus has let me to young Cæsar, to be one of the armourers of the expedition. It will bring my master a good sum, and at the end I am to have my freedom, and perhaps may do something for thee and for others. At Antioch I had some who knew me once. Who knows but we might have a workshop there together, in Antioch, the third city in the world—for beauty, the first)—and find thee there a bright-eyed Syrian bride?"

This was very far from the goal of Siward's ambition. To him every stroke of work was a step on the way to Herman, to the pine forests, where smith was a title of honour, and the hammer and anvil would be as much needed and as much esteemed as the spear or the sword in the liberation of his people.

He had thought Laon understood this; but now the old man's kindly dreams of an old age in Syria, to which he was to be as a son, fell painfully on him, and he worked on silently with a feeling that he was like one who was purchasing a treasure by false coin.

Laon's talk meantime flowed far away into fond descriptions of Antioch as he remembered it in his childhood, before he was orphaned and sold to pay his father's debts. The long sweep of the Orontes winding under the hills; the colonnades traversing the city; the groves on the hill-sides, with their temples, and foun-

tains, and statues; the strange blending of nations—not crushed into monotony by the overpowering presence of the metropolis and the emperor, as at Rome, but free to develop in the most vivid colours and in the richest forms all varieties of life—Syrians, Greeks, Jews, Egyptians, not stiffened into Latins, but all equally at home and luxuriating in that wilderness of beauty. On all this, glowing with the sunshine of childhood, contrasted with the monotonous years of drudgery along the gloomy paths between, and yet to be lit up with the after-glow of a freedom not altogether too late restored, the old man dwelt, until Siward's honesty could stand it no longer, and with Northern abruptness—all the more abrupt because of the pain of giving pain—he exclaimed,—

“Laon, that city of pleasures could be no home for me. I have a mother and a young sister to guard; perchance a father, in the North; certainly a country. If ever I am free, and can do anything worth doing, I am free for Germany, to work and fight for Herman and the children of my people.”

To his surprise, the old man betrayed no distress or displeasure. He only said, in the words of a wise man of old,—

“‘*We step into the same rivers, and we do not step into them.*’ You think Germany is the Germany you left. I, foolish old man, have been thinking of Antioch as the Antioch I left. You of yourself as the boy made captive

on the Rhine. I of myself as the child that wove garlands on the Orontes. It matters not. Let both keep their dreams. The Rhine and the Orontes are flowing still—have been flowing all the time. Time will show which tide is the stronger.”

But when Clœlia Diodora heard of the proposed departure, the little colour in her pale face forsook it altogether.

All the quiet hidden hours in the little dark room over ;—the sweet, peaceful hours, out of sight of every one, and within hearing of the old man’s talk ; and of those wild northern sagas of Siward’s which had bordered her world with a forest-land of mystery ; the singing of the old Latin lays to those two who loved to listen ; the readings in the wise books of old !

Moreover, between Clœlia and Siguna had been growing a quiet, strong affection. Siguna, the homely, imaginative German mother, had been less repelled than the people of the sunny artistic South by her deformity.

The Gothic poetry, with its humour and its pathos, with its power of interweaving the grotesque and quaint into its grandeur and beauty, lay hidden in her heart. She had a way of thinking of the poor girl with her dark, wistful eyes, and her shrunken face, as of one of the Æsir disguised for some mysterious purpose. Sometimes she would say to Siward,—

“Those eyes are the only part of Clœlia Diodora that really belong to her. All the rest is a mask.”

Little Hilda also had found out the treasures of imagery and legend in Clœlia, and would sit listening to her enrapt for hours ; so that between the captive mother and child and the maiden—captive in the poor crippled frame with a life-long captivity—a strong triple bond had been woven.

And now as Laon told her of Antioch, and how all this was to be rent away from her, she sat pale and speechless, with clasped hands.

“Child,” said the old man—“Diodora, my god-given—I am going for thy sake. I am going to earn freedom, perchance to make a home for thee. Thy parents will find some one to adopt, and then maybe will spare thee once more to the old man who thought thee worth saving of old.”

She shook her head.

“The sea !” she cried : “storms, shipwrecks, perils of strange lands, of robbers, of pirates !”

“Child,” he said, trying to smile, “there are no pirates now. Have I not told thee how the great Pompey swept the seas clear of them more than half a century since ! Roads through all the world, pirates swept from the seas. Thy countrymen have done their work well in making journeying safe. If only they had better ends to journey for ! Thou wouldst not fear these perils for thyself ?”

“For myself, no,” she said. “What worse have I to fear, for myself ?” Then kindling with the enthusiasm which always lay deep within her—

"You are going," she said, "and going to Athens! To the fields where the bravest men fight and the sweetest singers sang, and the olive-groves where Plato taught, and listened to Socrates; perhaps to the sea-shore where Thetis came up and with soft hands soothed her son, grieving from the height of her divine deathlessness that he should suffer—he who knew his life was but for a little while!"

"We shall not hear them, child!" said the old man. Then looking fondly at her, he added, "*Thou* perchance mightest!"

"Laon," she said suddenly, "by the Fountain of Egeria dwell a people of a strange Eastern race. I was sitting at our garden-door the other day when one of them, a venerable gray-headed old man, was resting on the slopes outside. He told me a strange story of One they are looking for—have been looking for more than a thousand years—a King, to set all the wrongs of the world right. They have been waiting for Him a thousand years; but the strange thing is, *now they feel sure He is near.*"

The old man smiled with a mournful contempt.

"Only a Jew!" he said. "Who heeds what the Jews say? A race of misanthropes and money-lenders."

"Some noble matrons have learned to worship with them," she replied. "So the old man said."

Laon looked in alarm into the girl's face.

"Do not fear for me," she said, answering his look.

"His words only made me think of the Bound Prometheus, of Io tossed hither and thither in wanderings without rest, and of the promise of a Deliverer to be born of her."

"Take heed, child," said the old man—"take heed. Some women are wicked—some Roman women have great burdens of crime on their souls—and therefore are superstitious. Many women have a great burden of sorrow, and therefore are superstitious. And all women have a dangerous longing for happiness, and are therefore superstitious. But thee, all the wisdom I have taught thee to love will guard from such delusions—from the degradation of becoming a prey to some base superstition or dark magic of Egypt or Syria! Thou hast walked too much in the daylight beneath the Porch and in the Grove to choose these damp and noisome caves."

"Stay and guard me then, Laon," she said, smiling; "or come quickly back. It was only your words that made me think again of the Jew. I wondered (it may have been a foolish thought) whether all these great Roads you spoke of have been made straight, and all the ways of the Great Sea have been swept clear, for some Great One, some Deliverer. The world seems to me so very restless and sad, wandering hither and thither, like Io, seeking rest and finding none. It came into my mind whether some Deliverer might be near. There are so many who suffer; but until that Jew spoke,

I do not remember to have met with any one who had such a hope. And then it flashed on me, what if you should come on traces of the Deliverer in the wonderful, mystical old East? The Son of Io, who was to deliver the Titan from the rock to which he was bound and from the eagle tearing his heart, was to come out of Egypt! And this prophecy of the old Jew—it does seem strange!”

“Not strange at all,” said the old man, sharply. “The legend of Io has been mixed with other Egyptian legends of Isis, and with the Apis worship. And the Jews were a race of slaves who escaped from Egypt. Born slaves, they had no golden age in the past, and so they made it in the future. Not strange at all, Diodora—not strange at all.”

But Siward listened, as he went silently on with his work, and wondered, pondering many things in his mind.





CHAPTER IX.

THEY left the city by the Appian Way, bordered by its miles of tombs—Siguna, Siward, and the child Hilda, among the other slaves of Germanicus.

Only a few months before, they had entered Rome as an unknown region of enchantment. They left the mistress of the world with no diminished faith in her witcheries, but with a terrible knowledge out of what elements her cup of enchantments was mixed.

As the lines of temples which crowned her hills faded from their eyes, Siward thought how Laon had said that the Romans had but one god—that all those temples where men burned incense to legendary divinities or to personifications of virtues were, in fact, but porticoes of the true temple, the Palace on the Palatine, whence Tiberius Cæsar sent his ravens into every home, to bring him tidings of men's words and deeds.

Yet the hearts of the German captives were less bitter than when, on that May day in the past year, on the

Flaminian Way, they had trodden the last weary steps of the Great Northern Road.

Siguna's thoughts went fondly back to one patrician house on the Cœlian, where she and her child were at that hour missed and mourned by as sorrowful and lonely a heart as any among the countless bands of captives throughout the world.

And in Siward's heart at least one pure vision remained ; one sweet maidenly form, one pure hallowing presence, beautiful within and without, was enshrined in his inmost thoughts. Far indeed above him as the Norna maidens, Clœlia Pulchra the Vestal, like a Norn herself, secretly poured the waters from the living wells, not only on the shrine of Vesta, but around the roots of the young German's tree of life. He saw her always as she shone on him first in her white stole, without a jewel or a decoration, lighting up the drudgery of his daily work with her bright presence, and gladdening it by the music of her voice.

He heard her say, "Thou hast done well and bravely !" and her words crowned him better than any wreath of laurel. He heard her say, "If I can set thee free, I will. If not, thou wilt do it. And that will be better for thee." And her words were to him as the oracle of a priestess or the prophecy of a Teuton Wala. She had said it, and he would do it. How could he fail ?

Before they had gone far from the city, they overtook old Laon limping slowly along, and in no amiable mood.

Yet old Laon also had done more to ward off the poison drops than Siward knew, grateful as he was to the old man.

For always in the midst of the works of destruction, the crimes and the avengings, the droppings of the serpent's venom, which make so large a portion of history, we may be sure He who has never ceased to care for man has had His silent ministers patiently warding off the poison. Little acts of kindness, little interchanges of human pity and goodwill have never ceased,—voices far too gentle and low for history to hear, but without which the world must long since have come to a point where history would have had nothing to record, and human life would have become a mere brute-like monotonous round of fighting and feeding, or as a chaos of demons.

Once only, as they went along the road to the coast, did all the old bitterness come back to Siward's heart.

He was walking beside his mother one evening, carrying a heavy burden, when on the slope of an opposite hill he suddenly perceived two Crosses standing out black against the sunset. Whether the forms on them were living or dead, at that distance could not be seen.

He stood between his mother and the terrible sight, and, trusting she had not seen it, endeavoured to stand as erect as he could beneath his burden, and to interest her in other thoughts.

But glancing anxiously at her, he met her eyes, and from the horror in them he perceived that she had seen but too plainly, and knew what the sight meant.

They made no further attempt at speech that evening, but walked behind each other in unbroken silence.

Lives like those of Germanicus and Agrippina make little echo. We should have known little of their pure and pleasant life together but for the tragedy which borders and breaks it, making a highway for the tread of History, as the burning deserts make a highway for the feet of the Bedouin into the pleasant pastures of the Holy Land.

The young Cæsar and his wife were doubtless as glad as any of their train to escape the oppressive presence of Tiberius and the Empress-mother.

There must have been refreshment for the young conqueror of the North, even in the storms which his ships encountered on the Ionian Sea. Once more he had to wage open war, now with the winds and waves of the Adriatic, as lately with the wild Northern Seas, and the wilder tribes which dwelt on their shores. The stifling atmosphere of the imperial court was left behind. The grandson of Octavia and the grand-daughter of Octavius could breathe freely by the coast of that Actium where Octavius had defeated Antony before Livia was Empress, or her son Tiberius had the most distant prospect of the throne.

Yet this journey was to Germanicus a virtual exile, a banishment from the work he had aspired to do for Rome, and the men he had trained to do it. New enemies, new comrades, new difficulties and dangers lay before him. One thing only remained unchanged.

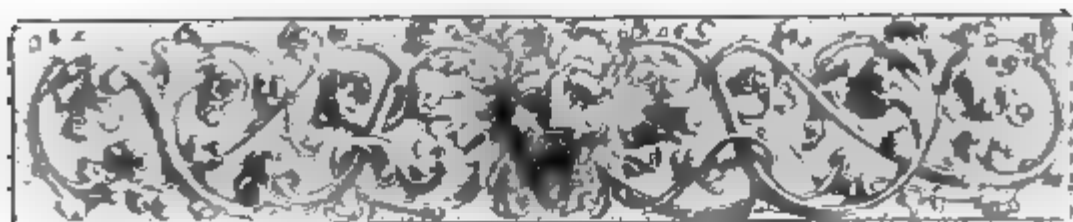
The suspicions of Tiberius, the "envy of the god" of the Romans, followed him unrelentingly everywhere. His friend Silanus had been purposely removed from the government of Syria, and an unscrupulous, ambitious man of the great old Calpurnian house, Cneius Piso, appointed to dog his footsteps and thwart his plans wherever he went.

It was by no accident that an associate was given to the young Cæsar who from the first undisguisedly disobeyed his orders and misinterpreted his acts, and whose wife Plancina, a favourite of the Empress-mother, lost no opportunity of arrogantly defying and insulting Agrippina.

Tiberius ventured to rely much on the fidelity to duty and the evenness of temper to be expected from Germanicus.

It was believed by many that he relied on Piso and Plancina for darker services than could be confessed; and that in neither reliance was he disappointed.





CHAPTER X.

AT length the storms of the Ionian Sea had been weathered, and the ships of Germanicus were tranquilly at anchor in the Piræus, with the brazen statue of the guardian Athena flashing on their sight from the summit of the Acropolis.

To Germanicus the past memories of the place were as sacred as to any of its citizens, and he chose to waive as much as possible of the state of the Cæsar, and to approach the ancient free city reverently,—not as, a century before, Sulla had entered, with a conquering army, battering down her Long Walls and their towers, but as a pilgrim to her shrines, and a disciple of her philosophic schools, attended by one tutor.

In that century Rome had passed as much under the intellectual rule of Athens, as Athens under the imperial rule of Rome. And along the road from the Piræus to the city, between the walls and towers which Sulla had reduced to ruins, Cæsar Germanicus passed reverently to the judgment-seat where Demosthenes had uttered models of oratory for Roman orators,—to the Painted

Porch, whose masculine philosophy had power to revive something of the spirit of old republican Rome in the degenerate Romans of the Empire,—to the theatres, once crowded with audiences which could appreciate Æschylus, —to the temples, where the Zeus and the Athena of Phidias, and of Olympus, dwarfed the Capitoline Jove to a mere tribal divinity of yesterday ; yet where beside the altars of the Olympians incense was burned by the Athenians to “the goddess Rome,” and to Augustus, the brother of his grandmother Octavia.

All Athens poured out along the roads and on the quays to do honour and give welcome to the adopted grandson of the “divine Augustus,” and “to represent to him the glories of Athens.” But the most sensitive Roman vanity could scarcely have been wounded by the loftiest Athenian glorification of the Acropolis, now that the Acropolis had become a pedestal for Cæsar.

Old Laon was in a tremor of repressed enthusiasm as they approached the glorious shores.

When he caught sight of the statue of Athena, he seized Siward’s arm and said,—“Boy, that statue is made of the brazen spoils of Marathon. No Persian could look at that for centuries without having flashed in his eyes the victory and the freedom of Greece.”

“Athens is free now ?” asked the boy.

“Free ! yes, a freed slave ! Free, as I shall be a freed man when I have worked out this expedition,” said the

old man bitterly. "*Suffered* to be free. But that old freedom, wrung from a mighty foe, was worth having," he added; "worth the three hundred lives freely sacrificed for it in yon dark cleft among the hills. It meant, —Herodotus, and Æschylus, and Phidias, and Socrates, and Plato, and Demosthenes; the Academy, the Lyceum, the Garden, the Porch. That was a liberty worth conquering. It was no mere liberty," he concluded grimly, "to hunt boars, and build huts, and roam as free as wild beasts in the forests."

Siward flushed slightly at the implied contrast. He had been thinking of the spoils of the legions of Varus, and of Herman the Deliverer, in the Teutoberger Forest, and wondering when trophies would be reared of these, and he felt abashed. But in a few minutes he took courage and said,—“The freedom came first, Laon, and then the wisdom and the glory; did it not?”

“The cities worth keeping free, and the men who conquered the freedom, and in whose souls the wisdom sprang, came first,” said Laon. “The ages have scarcely a second harvest like that. The old soil is worn out, the crops degenerate and grow feebler year by year. If you have yet virgin soil in your North, where will you find a Sower to sow new seed?”

The ship neared the quay. In a few moments came the shock of touching the shore, and all the turmoil of landing amongst the Athenians, eager to see and to hear some new thing. In the confusion the German captives,

having to take their share of the work, were separated from Laon.

It was not until some hours afterwards that Siward overtook the old man limping along the muddy road from the Piræus.

His philosophy was sorely tried by the difficulties of the way.

"Those Romans have, after all, their use in the world," he muttered. "I always said so. They make unexceptionable roads and drains."

At that moment a young Greek came up to Laon and gave him a cordial welcome. "Do you not remember me," he said—"Callias, the son of Damaris? I am here studying for my statues."

"Statues are all very well, my excellent Callias," said Laon, struggling out of a mud-hole into which he had plunged in the surprise of the meeting. "But is it possible that Pericles and Phidias and Plato, and all the wise men and artists, plunged through all this filth? That Socrates, for instance, tranquilly pursued his divine discourses, uninterrupted and unmoved by being plunged at every second breath into these mud rivers?"

"Possibly Socrates walked and talked after fine weather," said Callias, in a tone which implied that the difficulties and discourse of Socrates were not of prime moment to him. He would doubtless have echoed the sentiment that "to be the living slave even of a needy master was better than to be lord over all the dead."

“Your mother told me you were in Syria.”

“So I was. I came to make statues for Herod Antipas, for what they call his Golden House, in his new city of Tiberias.”

“You scarcely needed to study after Phidias to meet the taste of a Jew!” said Laon, contemptuously.

“I need it to meet my own,” said Callias. “Besides, the Herods are great builders, and have people around them who can tell them what they ought to admire. But I should scarcely need to copy Phidias, if I could have such models as I have seen on the quay of the Piræus to-day.”

“What! have the Olympians descended for thee also?” said Laon, smiling.

“Scarcely Olympians. Happy Hyperboreans, perhaps. One a tall, majestic, matronly woman, with a step stately enough, eyes soft enough, and a brow grand and calm enough for Juno. Another a child, who in a year or two will be the perfection of a Hebe—fair, with colour in her cheeks like the tips of a shell, and teeth like the pearly inside; eyes blue like the sea, and hair that made a sunshine around her face. Mother and child, they seemed,—simply dressed, yet well, like slaves of some great house.”

Siward listened eagerly. With his imperfect knowledge of the Greek which they were speaking, he half caught the meaning, when Laon addressed him,—

“Callias is speaking of your mother and sister.”

The young sculptor took a long look at Siward.

"I see! You must be of the same race," he said. "Let me model you in a group. I can pay well for models," he added softly to Laon, apart.

"We are slaves," said Siward, proudly. "I suppose the very reflection and image of us is not ours to sell! And if it were, we would not sell it."

"Nay, for that matter," said the young artist, "we are all slaves; we are all bought and sold. Only some have the advantage of putting their price into their own purse. Our forefathers created statues to make their old city beautiful, and saw them live in thousands of adoring eyes. I sell them to a barbarian prince, who values them by the cost of the marble, and the praise of his courtiers, among a people who, if they dared, would grind them to powder, and make me drink them in water, as their ancestors did."

"But you ~~make~~ the statues!" said Siward; "and if I were a sculptor, that is what I should like best. No one can rob you of that."

The sculptor turned towards the boy with a penetrating glance.

"True!" he said, in a more serious tone. "A little of that I understand. But you have been born at the wrong time, if you mean to live by that rule."

"Our friend comes from the North," interposed Laon, "where the world is still young."

"The family look like it," said Callias. "Such types only belong to pristine days."

"This boy interests me," he added to Laon in rapid Greek. "Can it be that the soul is like the body—beautiful, vigorous, and simple? Is there indeed a race like this? Then the Olympians may look to their thrones. I would fain see more of such a family. It is like bathing in a pure mountain river to breathe their presence. Are the mother and sister the same?"

"As pure and beautiful within and without," said Laon.

"Then, for old acquaintance' sake, bring me to know them! A bride from such a stock would be a perpetual fountain of youth."

"You talk of *renewing* youth, boy! You have scarce begun your youth."

"Do you not know? No one is young now." He spoke lightly. But a shade of unfeigned melancholy came over the mobile countenance, and took the light out of the keen dark eyes. "Long since the gods, and Youth among them, have been banished among the shades. And, in revenge, they have taken the sunshine and the solidity from earth, and have made mere shadows of us all."

"Wisdom remains," said Laon, severely.

"Yes, Philosophy remains," replied the young artist, bitterly, "the most shadowy shade of us all. She wanders, mumbling old saws, from the Lyceum to the Academy, from the Porch to the Garden, only in earnest when she wakes to fight over some old battle, or when she whispers

to the initiated her last secret,—that, not only are there no gods, and no Patria—there is *no truth*, at least none discernible for man."

As they talked, slow as their progress was, they had, nevertheless, approached the City.

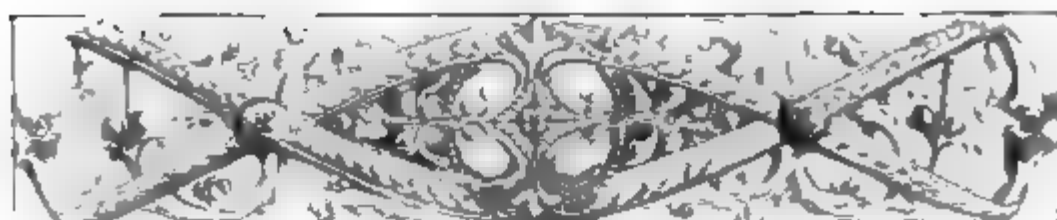
The glorious Acropolis, itself one great Temple with a hundred shrines, of which Greece was the platform, and the world the outer court, rose above them.

They went on through the City; through the Agora, where the free people of old had met. But now, among its hosts of beautiful statues lounged listlessly the idle throngs of a degraded populace, pestering the new-comers for alms or traffic.

Laon turned round in disgust.

"Come again to-night," he said to Callias, "when these chattering ghosts of old Athens are laid. Then we shall see the real Athens—the only Athens that will ever live any more. Meet us here, Siward," he added, suddenly; "here by the Altar of Pity. After all," he added, "it is the only Altar to Pity in the world. Siward, to-night we will come back to it, and you shall see our Athens. Bring your mother and the child, if you can. I suspect, if there is another Altar to Pity in the world, it is in thy mother's heart."





CHAPTER XI.

WHEN, that evening, old Laon led Siguna and the child Hilda to the Altar of Pity, by a sudden impulse she knelt and embraced the stone, and laid the soft cheek of the child against it.

"There is no Altar to Pity in Rome!" she said softly, as if to herself, as she arose.

"But in Athens," said the young Athenian sculptor, proudly, "there are no Crosses and no gladiatorial games. The two could not have the freedom of one city."

Siguna looked gratefully into his face.

"The young sculptor wished to see you," said Laon. "His mother Damaris you know. He himself is free; lives often at Antioch; and may be of service to you in the strange land, if the Cæsar remains there, and I must return to Rome."

He wished to say more. But Siguna was not a woman to whom it was easy to pay compliments. If indirect, she would scarcely have perceived them; if direct, she would either have not heeded or have resented them. Laon was, moreover, not clear as to what the German

theories might be as to models. More than one custom which was not questioned at Rome nor by Socrates, he had found the German boy regard with horror as a crime. Having, therefore, so far accomplished the desired introduction, after a few minutes of further conversation he suffered Siguna and the child to go back to the house of Germanicus, whilst he and Callias and Siward pursued their way about the City.

“Now, you must manage your own affairs,” he said aside to Callias. “Only, I should recommend you to say anything you want a German to understand in plain language, and to remember that the Northern people have peculiar notions of self-respect. The best way to the mother’s heart, if you really wish the girl for a bride, is to do something for the freedom of her children. On that point the family are fanatical.”

Very different images imprinted themselves on the minds of the two Greeks and the young German, as they walked together over the same hills and valleys and looked at the same Acropolis.

The colours of the frescoes were effaced in the moonlight, and the cluster of glorious temples, the many crowns wherewith the city had been crowned in the days of her youth, rose white as alabaster against the depths of the clear sky.

Siward looked at the fair columns and perfect outlines, and up to the bronze statue of the Virgin goddess, shining

in the moonbeams, her spear and shield outstretched in ceaseless guardianship over the sleeping city.

He looked, and thought of Clœlia the Vestal in the silent temple near the Roman Forum, feeding the sacred fire, and keeping, he thought, just such a guard for Rome.

He thought of Clœlia the Vestal, and of the Altar to Pity, and of the streets and hill-sides unpolluted by the Gladiatorial Games or by the Cross.

Callias thought of what he saw. The whole beautiful present scene flashed back from his mind as from a silver mirror.

The strip of level land edged by the shining sea, broken by the hills made to be the pedestals they were, bounded by the dim forms of the mountains, with groves of flowering shrubs, and silver-gray olives, and stately planes, and the silver threads of streams enriching it (after the recent rains) as with delicate embroidery.

And at their feet, in the Agora, on the hill-sides, on the hill-tops, Athens, in his eyes divinely peopled with the forms of gods and god-like men, under the silent colonnades, in the clear spaces under the clear heavens, enshrined in Divine Dwellings in every grove and on every slope ; forms of imperishable, immutable beauty ; a whole Olympus, a whole Iliad and Odyssey in marble.

Laon saw the Past, with its great deeds, and heard its great voices. The Beauty to him was merely a vesture for the Life.

The vesture remained. The life had passed away. But in the silence of the sleeping city all came back to him.

He saw the Persians beaten back from the shores ; he saw the Three Hundred—dead, yet deliverers—vanquished, yet victors—in that dark pass of Thermopylæ.

He saw in the brazen Athena the work of Phidias and the spoils of Marathon.

From the Painted Porch in the Agora, from the Garden in the City, from the trees by the dry bed of the Ilissus, or from the greener groves of the Academy, he heard great voices,—even then voices of old, even then, he felt, to almost all men around him, faint murmurs from the world of shadows ;—the voice of Socrates over the poison-cup, the voices of Plato, of Aristotle, of Æschylus, of Sophocles, and of Demosthenes.

The old man sat in a silence longer than usual with him. He felt his companions scarcely in harmony with him, and it was one of those moments when a discord jarring on the music within would have been not merely an annoyance, but a pain. He wished for the child Clœlia Diodora, his disciple, his god-given. She would have understood. But what was the use of saying what he felt about Greece to a sceptical young sculptor or to a Northern barbarian ?

The two young men roamed about the hills together, and soon became on very good terms with each other ; but the old man pleaded his lameness, and sat on the

rock-platform whence had resounded the voice of Demosthenes, meditating alone.

When they came back they found him still seated, leaning on his staff, but with his face to the City, instead of its being, as when they left him, towards the Acropolis.

“The true Sanctuary of Athens is not there,” he said, rising and pointing up to the Acropolis.

“It is below, in the prison where Socrates took the poison-cup calmly and cheerfully as a wine-cup at a banquet; where the officer of the prison wept for him, deeming him the most noble, meek, and excellent man that ever entered into that place; but where he wept not for himself, for he said, ‘When I have drunk the poison I shall no longer remain with you, but shall depart to some happy state of the blessed;’ conjuring those who loved him not to grieve when he died, as if it was indeed he who suffered some dreadful thing, or to say of his interment, It is Socrates who is carried out and buried. ‘Of all his time, the best, and wisest, and most just,’ the best men of his time said, yet refusing to be called wise, but only one who loved Wisdom. That vanquished man was the true victor here. Why should we grieve for Athens!” he continued. “In her youth she rejected Socrates, and now in her old age she has built a temple to the goddess Rome, and Cæsar Augustus, beside her Parthenon!”

“Even Socrates refused to be called wise,” said Callias. “Doubtless he knew how impossible it is to know—”

"To know what?" said old Laon, reviving and enkindling at the prospect of a debate. "To know of what the world is made—whether of fire, or of water, or of nothing. What matters it not to know? But that it is possible to know what it does matter to know; what beauty is, and justice, and truth—what *we* are,—*this* Socrates lived to make clear to all men, this he died because men would not know. This Athens has perished because she would not know. And this, young men, it matters infinitely that you and I should know."

"Can we know?" said Callias. "Did he know? Did he not after all embark as on a raft, risking himself on an unknown sea? Has the 'surer conveyance or the divine reason' he spoke of yet come?"

Laon did not reply.

As they spoke they had been winding slowly round Mars Hill, the Areopagus, Laon leading. At that moment they came out on a wide deep ravine on the eastern side of the hill.

"That is right!" murmured the old man at last. "I thought I remembered. Boy," he said, turning to Siward, "you asked me once in what temple I worshipped. Come and see."

Further and further they penetrated into the shadows of the ravine, until at the end of the chasm, in a recess where not a ray of the moon, now sinking, reached, they came to a natural cave in the rock, faced with a few simple columns, scarcely perceptible in the gloom.

"This is the shrine of the Eumenides," the old man said in a low voice. "Here at least we must call them by their least-dreaded name! Here came of old from the Acropolis the three avenging goddesses."

"How are these divine beings propitiated?" asked Siward after a long silence, his voice also insensibly subdued to the awed stillness of the place.

"They are never propitiated!" Laon replied. "What they determine is just, and cannot be changed. Ceaselessly their noiseless footsteps pursue the murderer, the perjurer, those who disobey parents, who scorn the suppliant or the aged, or betray the guest."

"Their steps are slow," said Siward, thinking of the betrayed wife of Herman, and of the murdered babes of the house of Clœlius.

"They can afford to be slow," said Laon. "They are older than all the gods."

"What are their forms?"

"There are two very contrary images of them," said Laon. "Necessarily. To those they pursue they seem clothed in black, their hair twined with serpents, their eyes dripping blood. They are called the Avengers, the Furies. To the just, and to the injured whom they avenge, they seem beautiful, grave, and majestic virgins, clad and girt like huntresses, as those who have work to do, and cannot linger about it—the Eumenides. For they are swift enough when the time comes. And by their side is justice, the Divine!"

“And are sacrifices offered to them?” asked Siward.

“Some sacrifice black sheep to them,” Laon replied, “as to the gods of the lower world. Not, I think, to much avail. But I know hands from which I think they would accept the white turtle-dove, and the golden narcissus, also sacred to them, gladly.”

Slowly and in silence they retraced their steps through the solemn ravine, leaving that secret shrine of Conscience buried deep in the rocky heart of Athens, underneath the glorious temples which shone on her sunny heights.

And the facts most deeply stamped on Siward's mind, as they quitted Athens, were, that in the meeting-place of her people there stood an Altar to Pity, and deep in the bosom of her hills a Temple to Justice.





CHAPTER XII.

AWAY from Attica sailed the ships of Germanicus, over the sunny Grecian seas. Their last glimpse of the beautiful city was by sunset—all her pure and stately marbles glowing with a tender rose, which deepened into crimson on her weather-beaten crags, and contrasted with the imperial purple which draped the further hills.

To the eye still the Athens of the glorious old days; perhaps even to the eyes of Cæsar Germanicus, as her multitudes poured out on his departure to lavish on him the parting honours, and speed his ships on their eastward way.

His sojourn had been one festival. Perhaps that flush of welcome seemed to all for the moment as the flush of rekindling life. The responsive enthusiasm which his genuine admiration for their past rang out of the Athenians, may have hidden from him the hollowness of the present. It is not from the high places of the world that the widest or the truest prospects are seen.

From Athens he sailed to the coasts of Tróy. The

grandson of Augustus had other memories besides those of Homer to make those shores sacred to him.

The brief blossoming-time of Latin poetry had scarcely passed. Its fragrance lingered on the air. Virgil had died not forty years before; Horace scarcely thirty. Their gardens and farms must still have retained the traces of their planting. Ovid was dying of sleeplessness and melancholy, an exile by the Euxine Sea, by the mouth of the river Danube, on the borders of the Empire.

The earnest character of Germanicus—himself, it was said, not without the gifts of a poet and an orator—must have given him more sympathy with Virgil, the earnest and religious poet of the Imperial House, than with Horace, the fanciful singer of the light and luxurious society of the Empire. His own life had more of the grave epic than of the light and graceful lyric in it.

Around his pure and simple life, on every side the laxity of a state slowly dissolving through its own vices; around his own earnest and loyal character, the entangling and cramping suspicions of a jealous court; in no sense and for no period were the brief years allotted him a voyage over a sunny sea.

Behind him on this very voyage, his enemy, the friend of Tiberius, followed close—the aristocratic Piso; as a member of the old Calpurnian House, despising the grandson of the plebeian Octavius; as the confidential emissary of Tiberius, losing no opportunity of thwarting

the nephew whose popularity the Emperor dreaded ; as a practical and prosaic Roman, priding himself on his scorn for the young Cæsar's literary tastes.

Scarcely had Germanicus left Athens as a reverent pilgrim when Piso entered it, with all the insolent pomp of the dominant race, openly ridiculing the courtesy of his chief, and calling the Athenians "an impure conflux, the offscouring of various nations," enemies of Sulla and of Augustus.

In which sentence, when he heard it, old Laon grimly acquiesced.

The Roman claims of Trojan descent were by no means palatable to the old man, and he grumbled at the expedition of Germanicus to the plains of Troy. The Latin literature he considered an upstart reproduction of the Greek. Against the *Æneid* he cherished an undisguised prejudice, half literary, half political.

"The whole thing," he said to Siward and to Callias, who accompanied them, "is nothing better than an attempt to patch up the Imperial pedigree; an endeavour to make a plebeian house into a patrician by giving it ancestors in the clouds. The gods exist in it for nothing but to be the forefathers of Cæsar; Providence exists but to insure the supremacy of Cæsar. The whole of our glorious old Olympus is cut up into household images to carry in procession at the Imperial funerals."

Indeed, much as he appreciated the courage and courtesy of Germanicus, Laon had something of an aris-

tocratic scorn for the new Roman attempts at literature.

"Cæsar Germanicus would have been better employed subduing the Germans, and making canals in Batavia, like his father, than hunting out antiquities at Ilium. No doubt he would have liked it better; it is not his fault that he is here. But the true type of the Roman is Cneius Piso. The Emperor feels it, and we Greeks feel it. It is more tolerable for these people to profess to scorn us, than to pretend to understand us."

"Æneas!" he grumbled, as he was toiling over the plains of Troy; "who ever heard of Æneas? If he were a true Trojan, he ought to have died with his family at Troy, instead of wandering over the world breaking foolish women's hearts; himself, like a foolish woman, listening to every fortune-teller he came across."

Callias ventured to suggest the beauty of some of Virgil's descriptions of nature.

"Babbling," said the old man—"babyish babbling, as in a dying old age, of the green fields and flowers of childhood! What do the old patricians or the new rich men of Rome care for green fields or groves, except as places to cool wine and eat peacocks and sucking-pigs in, purchased at the price of plundered provinces? Nothing irritates one," he concluded, "like this simulated simplicity, this extra-fine rusticity, except this turning of poetry and religion into a factory of fictitious pedigrees."

The old man did not recover until they sailed out of

sight of the funeral mounds of Troy and the heights of Ida. Then he softened a little towards the Latin poets ; and conceded that Virgil had the only religion, the only poetry, a Roman was capable of—the worship of the goddess Rome ; but that, blinded by the degradation of his time, he had mistaken Imperialism for patriotism.

“ And who are we, the Greeks of this age, that I should scorn any ? ” he concluded, sadly. “ The beauty of our old days was the beauty of athletes, trained to the race and the battle-field—the beauty of strength. The beauty of these days is the beauty of the barber and the perfumer. Of old the thought expressed the words, and no man talked of style ; now the style but hides the crumbling dust of thought.”

At Lesbos, Agrippina gave birth to her last child—the last joyful family event in the brief life of Germanicus. Everywhere the father and mother and the children went together, making a home for each other on any shore or on any sea. They had rejoiced together over the birth of nine children, and mourned together over the death of three.

At Colophon they landed on the Asiatic shore. By the banks of its cool stream, and under the fragrant shadows of its pine-covered mountain, Germanicus consulted the oracle of the Clarian Apollo, where deep in a cave on the hill-side a fountain bubbled up from its rocky source. The priest drank of the sacred waters, and gave forth the oracular answer in verse.

Dark rumours of what the significance of this oracular answer was were murmured among the household of Germanicus. Siward was much cast down. The German villages which Germanicus had burned, and the hosts he had slain in fair fight, were merely in the captive's eyes the necessary ravages of war. If ever he reached the goal of his ambition, and wielded hammer and sword under Herman, these wrongs he hoped to aid in avenging. And, meantime, the courtesy of the young Cæsar towards those enemies with whom he came personally into contact, and his serene and generous temper, had wrought its charm on the captives, and attached them to him. Siward felt him to be an enemy it would be an honour to fight, and a master it was no degradation to serve.

"Are there indeed Walas—prophetic men and women—among the Greeks?" Siward said to Laon, as they re-embarked at Colophon; "and can these forebodings be true?"

"It needs no special inspiration to forebode mischief to the man Tiberius envies," was Laon's oracular reply—"a man whose footsteps are dogged by Cneius Piso and the insolent Plancina."

At Rhodes it was given to Germanicus to do a deed worthy of Christian chivalry. He well knew with what purpose Piso was sent, and how malignantly he and his wife were fulfilling it: yet, when at Rhodes a sudden tempest drove the ship of Piso on the rocks, and a little

languor or delay in sending help might have suffered his enemy to perish, the victim of the winds or of the Eumenides, he sent aid to him speedy and effective, as to his dearest friend, and saved him from destruction. Such triumphs are not assigned to many. To Germanicus, the act was simple and inevitable, as part of his every-day life of duty.

The rescued enemy went on his way—not softened, and therefore necessarily hardened to a baser bitterness—to thwart and malign his deliverer by every means in his power; whilst Germanicus went quietly on his way to fulfil his task for Rome. Well knowing the intrigues of Piso against himself, he left him to carry them out as he might; whilst he marched his troops into Armenia, reduced Cappadocia to the condition of a province, and, like a general of the Republic in her noblest days, true to the Roman standard of patriotism and duty, himself uncrowned and a loyal citizen, placed the royal crown of Armenia on the head of another—Artaxes, the chief recognized by Rome.

The world was not without its foreshadowings, as it has not been without its reflected lights, of those silent thirty years of subjection to Duty, of “patient continuance in well-doing,” then being lived at Nazareth. At Nazareth, so near Antioch—in the very province where the young Cæsar was bearing his burden of stately rule—the true King was bearing His burden of loving service.

Germanicus knew not of Him.

But we, who believe and are sure that He did not begin to live at Bethlehem, nor begin to work for men in Galilee, any more than He ceased to live on Calvary, know that His care for men does not begin when men begin to know it.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE year fatal to Cæsar Germanicus had opened. The restlessness of that unhappy age was on him. Perhaps, also, something of the restlessness of disease—the insatiable longing which sometimes besets those whose days are to be few to make them full, to live long in the little while. Early in the year he left Syria to make a progress through Egypt.

By doing this he was, perhaps unconsciously, breaking a statute of Augustus. Egypt, the granary of Rome, from which every spring the Roman citizens drew their supplies of food, was not to be trodden by Roman feet without permission from the Emperor.

Every summer, in the harbour of Alexandria, it was possible some daring rebel hand might seal and dry up the fountain which fed the life of Rome. Anchored by the white quays of the great mart of the world, lay the fleet of Alexandrian corn-ships. Stored in their holds lay the golden fruit of Egypt and the Egyptian river. Before them stretched the Mediterranean, with its sudden storms. On the other side of the sea, on the nearest

points of the Italian shore, watchmen were stationed to catch the first glimpse of the life-bringing sails—full-set to distinguish them from others, even when close to the harbour—and to despatch the glad tidings by beacons and flying posts to the anxious City. The departure of that fleet was a sacred event. Its arrival was a national festival.


For already the mistress of the world, looking down over a waste Campagna, and on scattered villas, and on farms tilled by slaves, from which the peasant-proprietors had long since been absorbed, depended for her existence on the work of other men and the harvests of other soils.

There was a reverse to the medal of the “goddess Rome” enthroned with her civic crown beside Augustus. It was the mendicant Rome kneeling to receive her dole of daily bread at the hands of the Emperor, whilst the Emperor anxiously watched the winds on which his granaries depended.

Such a treasure-house needed to be well guarded, and Germanicus received a sharp remonstrance from Tiberius for entering it without special sanction.

He had probably regarded it rather as the threshold of another treasure-house, the key of the ancient granaries from which Greek and Jew alike had tasted “the wisdom of the Egyptians.”

To him, as to us, a land of remains and ruins, a mummy swathed in records of its own past glory; the



intervening eighteen centuries between us and old Rome being but one stage in that far-reaching past. To him, as to us, a land strangely symbolized by its river flowing so invariably from unexplored sources ; its Sphinx, seeming to hide beneath her mute lips the answer to riddles never solved ; its Pyramids, burying (among whatever other secrets) under a mountain of stone the lost history of a forgotten life.

Commercially and intellectually, indeed, Egypt had again begun to stir with revived activity ; as the channel of the trade with the East, the vast granary of the West, and the great paper and glass factory of the empire. The furthest extremes of the empire were continually brought before the eyes of the travellers as they journeyed through the Nile valley. On the river they were constantly passing boats and barges filled with paper and glass of native manufacture and grain of native growth. Along the banks, pencilled against the glowing sky, moved slow droves of camels and mules, laden with spices, perfumes, dyes, and gems, from the furthest south and east, and guarded by German horsemen brought from the Northern forests.

In the schools of Alexandria, with their ingenious compounds of theosophies and philosophies, Eastern and Western, Hebrew and Greek, Callias found much to admire ; but old Laon was far from content with them.

“ Mere shreds and patchwork,” he said—“ patched together, not interwoven ; mere *débris*—crumbled to-

gether, not fused. To make a fusion, you must have a furnace glowing with living fire ; and this is an age, not of fire, but of the ashes of old fires. Mere dust and ashes of thought, from Grece, Persia, India, Syria. Not fused together," he concluded ; "crumbled together, and all dust."

More especially, however, his indignation was excited by Philo and the philosophic Jews of Alexandria.

"Of all false pretences in the world," he said, "the worst is a philosophizing Jew. It is even worse than an æsthetical Roman. If the Jews have anything fine about them, it is their intense, unconquerable national life, their uncompromising fidelity to their lawgiver, and to their One Imperial Divinity. Give me the narrowest and most exclusive Pharisee that ever glared at us Gentiles under his phylacteries, rather than the smoothest Hellenist among them."

"You would prefer the Egyptian Therapeutæa, or the Essenes by the Dead Sea," Callias said, "who, regarding all matter as evil and the body as a prison, live in seclusion from all men, in adoration of God, until death shall absorb them into His essence."

"They are not essentially Jews at all," Laon replied. "Mystics are of no age or race. They are a Vestal priesthood, guarding the deathless fire for all humanity—an echo of the sense of exile and home-sickness which besets the highest natures everywhere."

Yet vigorous as might be the life of the present in

Egypt, it was evident that the life of the past had been mightier. Even then the cities of the dead, the "durable dwelling-places," dwarfed the cities of the living. Even then, on the heart of the German captive, the land of the mysterious River left two impressions, which effaced all the rest : that Death lasts longer than life, and Nature is stronger than man.

The Temple of Apis was still standing, and had its priesthood—a priesthood which counted its duration by millenniums. The stately Black Bull, with the distinctive white marks on brow and back, was marching about his sacred courts, adored and giving oracles, while his huge sarcophagus was awaiting him in the solemn vaults of the rock-temple underground,

Again, with a restless foreboding, Cæsar Germanicus consulted the oracle in the Apis Temple ; and again dark rumours circulated among his followers as to what the enigmatical answer threatened—the shadows, doubtless, of that love which cannot exist among mortal creatures without fear. Everywhere he won the confidence of the people by a condescension and courtesy which seem to have been as inseparable from him as his athletic beauty and his temperate, pure life. It was natural in him to wear the Gaulish bearskin in Gaul, and the Grecian sandals in Grecian lands. Popularity followed him ; he did not seem to seek it. He bore about him the indefinable charm which often surrounds those who tread this earth lightly, as those who have not to build

on it, but to pass through it, and go early to dwell elsewhere. Not being occupied with far-reaching schemes of personal ambition, he had leisure to throw himself altogether into the life of the moment, and of the men around him ; leisure to dwell in the past—to be kind and thoughtful to all near him ; space in his mind for a wide lateral horizon, and wide distances behind him—perhaps, unconsciously, because the horizon before him was so near.

He visited the mighty remains of Thebes. One of the oldest priests interpreted to him the hieroglyphics on its huge obelisks, telling him of the armies and conquests and costly tributes of empires that had preceded and equalled Rome, and had passed away for ever. He saw the Pyramids, “raised like mountains amid almost impassable heaps of sand.” He heard the music “struck by the solar rays” from the stone statue of Memnon.

For the first time, in the Temple of Apis, Siward came in contact with an organized priesthood. In Rome he had seen priests, but they were ministers of state, or diviners of the destinies of Rome. At Delphi and at Claros he had heard of a priest and a priestess ; but each was a mere isolated organ of divine utterances—a solitary gateway into the unknown world.

In Egypt still existed a priestly caste, with rites reaching back to unknown ages. The gods were not deified men or humanized divinities, but mystic animals : the

monotonous, mysterious, changeless, unprogressive animal nature, adored in itself as a type of the monotonous changes and the changeless revolutions of the visible world, especially of the Egyptian world of the Sun, the River, and the Desert, with its infinite expanses of starry sky; Nature and Death surrounding, outlasting, hemming in the little life of man.

“*Did* they indeed hem in this little life? Or was this little life but to expand through them into something wider and more enduring—to blend with this infinite Nature—to endure through this unconquerable Death? *Was* this life of ours indeed but as the green strip between two deserts?”

Questions of this kind came into Siward's mind as he stood with Laon among the tombs by the Nile, little able as he was to frame the questions with his lips.

“What did they mean by all this work?” he asked, as they looked round on the elaborate paintings and inscriptions on the walls of one of the sepulchral chambers. “Is it for the dead, or for the living?”

“The living made this for themselves when they should be dead,” said Laon. “Their houses they regarded as only sojourning places. This was to be their abode. On this they lavished all their art. Life, they felt, is transitory. Death endures.”

“*Death* endures,” murmured Siward. “But the *dead*? Are those temples to Death the conqueror, or to the living he conquered?”

“Rumours had come to them of long journeys of the soul when it departs hence,” said Laon. “These were written in their Book of the Ritual of the dead, which they placed in the hands of their mummies. A strange itinerary for the long journey of the soul when it leaves the body, directions of the way it is to take, descriptions of the enemies and the adventures it is to meet in the unknown world, and of a solemn judgment it is to undergo beyond the dark waters, for the deeds done in the body.”

“It?—the soul?—we?” asked Siward eagerly. “Who would not hear more of this? But if it—if we—depart, for whom is this abode made beautiful? The soul never entered here; she had begun the long journey before the mummy was laid here. What knows she of this? What is all this to her?”

“What do *we* know?” said Laon. “What is all this world, what are heaven and earth, stars, deserts, and seas to us?”

“But, Laon,” said the boy, “they must have thought they knew. They must have meant to serve some one by all this.”

“There were dim sayings about the soul coming back to claim its old companion; of a Rising Again,” said the old man musingly. “But this I cannot think; to come back from the stars and the free heavens, and the acquittal of the great judgment, to this? Does the Psyche come back into the chrysalis?”

And silently they left the silent place.

But days afterwards, as they were sitting one evening on the deck of the boat on the broad Nile, Siward said to Laon,—

“Who wrote that Book of the long journey of the dead? Who could write it but some one who had gone and come back? Did this ancient people ever know of one who had?”

Laon shook his head.

“The Egyptians are indeed an ancient people,” he said. “But the most ancient nations in the world have no record of any who came back to tell of that journey.”

There was a pause, and afterwards looking up through the pure night air and through the stars, Siward spoke again,—

“Laon,” he said, “these tombs are for the rich. The rich only who can build themselves houses on earth can be embalmed, or can build themselves enduring dwellings. Here, also, as in our Valhalla, the dwelling-place of our elect, our heroes, there is no place for the poor, for the slave, for the multitude.”

“Philosophy has her high things for the slave, for the poor,” said Laon.

“For the wise slave,” Siward rejoined, “the wise poor, those who are rich in inner wealth. But these multitudes, everywhere, these poor disarmed peasants who toil from morning to night with no reward but blows, and hardly bread enough to keep them from starvation,

—for these no one has any hope, nor any good tidings!”

“These multitudes,” said old Laon carelessly, “the base, ignorant multitudes! Those who in Rome, if free, live as beggars on the doles of Egyptian corn; swarming like noisome flies about the tall houses of the Suburra, and finding their highest pleasure in seeing beasts and men torture each other at the games? The multitudes who, in Athens, suffered Socrates to be murdered? who live like butterflies or grasshoppers, chattering and fluttering from infancy to dotage? What good tidings would you have for them? They chirp and flutter, or sting and buzz, or croak and paddle away their little lives, and perhaps even store honey and wax for the generations of a coming summer. What would you have more for such? Some other world in which they may chirp and buzz, and flutter and chatter on for ever, and perhaps *not* croak or sting? It is to be hoped in all courtesy that such a world exists. But who would care to know? Not they, at least.”

“O Laon,” said the German captive, “*I* am not wise! I feel it but too keenly among all these generations of the wise. I am not wise, I or mine, as your sages. For us what good tidings can come?”

“If your race have not the wisdom of our sages,” interposed Callias, who had been standing near, “you have beauty, of soul and flesh. And for Beauty there is a place for ever. Because Beauty, as well as Wisdom,

and Justice, and Truth, are real; at least, so Laon's sages say."

The boy shook his head.

"That any should be beautiful seems such an accident," he said. "These toiling, suffering multitudes, crouching under yokes, with the Beauty as well as the Wisdom crushed out of them; to such it seems strange that no religion and no philosophy can give a helping hand, or a pitying word. For these are in the world everywhere. These are the multitudes."

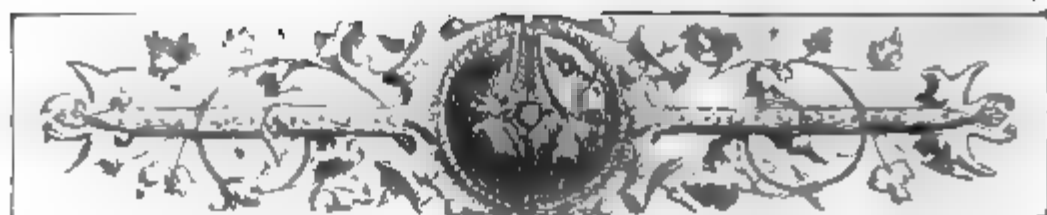
"For those who have neither Beauty nor Wisdom," replied Callias, with a disdainful smile, "for those, indeed, I think the less room the better, in any world!"

But Siward's earnest nature was aroused, and not easily to be lulled.

"It seems," he said to Laon, "almost as if the whole race of men were like those doomed races you told me of, pursued by solemn avenging Eumenides. If one could tell for what crimes, or for whose, and find an expiation! or at least teach men how to avoid such evil for the future!"

"Philosophy does tell the wise," said old Laon. "Are you not wise? Then rise above these multitudes, and *become* wise. I am trying to teach you all day long."

And, with some impatience, he closed the dialogue.



CHAPTER XIV.

AT length the journey through Egypt was over. Germanicus and his household were all bound for Antioch, but by different routes.

Some had gone by sea to Seleucia. To Laon and Siward it was permitted to accompany Callias, who was to pass through Judæa to Tiberias, the new city of Herod Antipas, which he was adorning with Greek sculpture. It was said that in Syria some secrets were known as to the tempering of fine sword-blades ; and old Laon hoped to gain some knowledge which would enrich him in the years of liberty which he was expecting. Siguna also and little Hilda were with them.

As they paced up and down on the long quays of Alexandria, waiting for the ship which was to carry them to Joppa, they frequently passed an old man who was standing under the shadow of the angle of a wall, with a woman seated beside him, still comparatively young, the pallor and the changed curves of her face apparently the result rather of sorrow than of age.

The old man's lips were moving in an audible murmur,

and he did not seem to pay any heed to the passers-by. His absorption in his occupations and indifference to all around exercised a kind of fascination on Siward, and Laon's words fell on his ear uncomprehended as he watched the strangers. The dress of the old man was unusual; on his brow, around his wrists, and on the fringed hems of his long white robe, were bound strips of parchment inscribed with strange large black letters, not like either Greek or Latin; and from time to time he made low obeisances, touching his forehead as if in homage to some unseen throne. The murmured words also, when Siward came near enough to hear them, he found were in a language utterly unintelligible to him, nasal, guttural, with weird, sad, monotonous cadences in the voice.

At length he ventured to ask Laon who this stranger could be, and what he would be doing.

Laon cast a careless passing glance on the old man and the sad-looking woman, and said lightly,—

“Jews! Jews! only some old Jewish bigot praying.”

“Praying to what—to whom?” Siward ventured to inquire further. “There is no temple and no image.”

“How can I tell?” said Laon hastily. “Do I know every superstition in every tribe in these superstitious Oriental countries? Praying to the bits of his law written on his garment, perhaps. When Pompey entered the Sanctuary of their Temple, he is said to have found it empty. But there were traditions of

its once having contained stone tables with writing on them. I suppose they worship their Book. They boast that they have a very ancient sacred Book. But how should I know? It concerns no one but themselves. They look on themselves as the rightful masters of the world, and on all the rest of the world as enemies. When they could, they massacred every one who came near them, on the ground of their not being Jews. And probably they would do the same now, if they could; they are always in insurrection, following some Pretender who promises to make them a nation of kings. But the Roman rule is good at least for this. It keeps down fanatics like these. And yet they creep in everywhere. They have a genius for money-making. Here at Alexandria they all but outnumber the Greeks, and have two of the best quarters of the City to themselves."

There was something in Laon's tone, in speaking of this Jew, so different from his usual light and courteous tolerance of other religions and opinions, that Siward was perplexed. And at that moment the words of Clœlia Diodora about the old Jew by the Fountain of Egeria at Rome flashed back on his memory.

"They are always following some Pretender," he mused, repeating Laon's words to himself; and in his calm Teutonic way he pondered the matter over in silence, until he came on what seemed to him a solution. "Perhaps because of this Great One the old prophecy told them to expect."

And this ancient adored Book, this intense and exclusive Patriotism, this long-expected Deliverer linked themselves together in his mind.

He longed to ask more, but felt that in Laon's present frame of mind questions were more likely to close than to open further sources of information, and was silent.

Laon only vouchsafed one more remark on the subject.

"What these Jews believe or worship," he said, "is of no moment to any but themselves. The exceptionally bad thing about them is that they have no respect for other peoples' religions or gods, but have the audacity to declare that there is no God save their own, and that all other worship is not merely useless but wicked. Any belief may be tolerated in men, especially if it is hereditary and national, if people will keep it to themselves. But a religion which would invade and conquer all other religions, is not to be tolerated, any more than a nation which does the same. Unless, indeed, it can succeed," he concluded, sarcastically. "In which case the only remedy is to conquer the conqueror from within, as we Greeks reconquer the Romans who can think."

The voyage to Joppa lasted some days, in consequence of contrary winds and calms.

The Jewish strangers were their fellow-passengers.

At first they kept strictly apart ; but often Siguna's eyes met those of the Hebrew woman sadly watching her and little Hilda, until by degrees a friendly intercourse sprang up between them. At first only by means of

signs, little attentions to the child, little presents of Syrian confectionary, little nameless kindnesses. Then a few broken Greek words, or Latin, and such extemporized language as hearts drawn to each other can always find; and now and then Siward, with his more extended knowledge of Greek, was called on to interpret.

"He is your son," the Jewess said. "You are happy. You live for him."

"We are slaves; we are exiles," the German mother replied. "We live for our masters' will. I may be separated from him at any moment, at any caprice of our enemies."

"I am separated from my sons. For ever. By the will we can none of us resist; by the bars we can none of us pass. God is almighty. The sacred writers say He is merciful."

And slowly, through the quiet hours, the story of her life crept out.

"I had two children, once, like you. He took them both. We lived in Rome, near the Fountain of Egeria, on the Cœlian Hill. We were poor. The river overflowed, and flooded the low grounds of the City. The noisome exhalations entered our little home. Others, who were rich, fled. We were poor, and had nowhere to fly to. The fever seized my boys. First the youngest, a babe; then the eldest, a child like this. We laid them underneath the rocky hills, in the Catacombs of our people. We would not bury our dead among the

heathen. On their graves we carved the dove with the olive branch, and the word Peace. For my father is holy as one of the prophets. And he said, 'The waters will subside, the flood which sweeps all the race of men away ; and, as the dove in the Deluge of old, these our sweet babes shall be welcomed into the Ark of God—bearing the olive branch of peace.' And even now they are at peace. But from me, from me peace is gone for ever, until I rest where they rest ; until the heavens are no more, and I am welcomed where they shall be welcomed. If ever He deem me worthy, who has found me so unworthy of His gifts here."

So, through the days they were together, she spoke. To Siguna much that she said was dim and strange, but the mothers' hearts interpreted each other.

Only, the wife of Olave the brave soldier and smith wondered that the stranger spoke so little of her husband. The sons seemed to have been everything to her. She watched the old Jew to see why and how this could be.

And by degrees she began to understand.

Their journeying with the Jewish strangers did not end with the voyage. Then, as now, in spite of the firmness of the Roman rule, it was expedient for travellers in Judæa or Galilee to travel in companies. Besides the danger of the predatory wandering Arabs, always penetrating into the heart of the country by means of the creeks of desert which run up into it from the east, the land was infested by the remains of various bands of

fanatical insurgents—precursors of the “Assassins”—followers of Judas of Galilee, in their own eyes consecrating a life of lawless rapine by a fierce fanatical patriotism, and by wild hopes of a coming Jewish King.

The Jew Onias was glad of Gentile protection for himself and his wife Esther, and for the numerous gold pieces which, in spite of his apparent poverty, he knew experienced thieves would soon have detected under the hems and folds of his garments. And while sympathy had broken down the barrier of race between the German mother and the childless Esther, old Laon and Onias had found a meeting-point in sundry elaborate negotiations concerning the manufacture and sale of arms.

Their destination also was the same. Antioch was the present abode of Onias and Esther, as well as the native city of Laon.

It seemed to Laon that when once he should be free, and supplied with the capital which Onias “thought he had friends” who might lend him, all things would be possible to him—for himself and those he cared to help. Indeed, he felt already in the position of a patron to Siward, Siguna, and Callias; and accordingly, armed with these benevolent intentions, he indulged himself even more than usually in sarcasms and whimsical severities of language.

* * * * *

And meanwhile the lives of the sisters Cloelia flowed on with a slow monotony at Rome.

Services begun with enthusiasm by the young Vestal priestess fell into a grave dull routine.

"For Rome! For Rome!" she repeated to herself, as she fed the sacred fire, or drew the pure water from the spring. "I am only doing simple woman's work—such as every matron does for her husband's hearth—for the hearth-fire of the Patria of Rome."

But none of the sorrows and joys which keep the even flow of daily duty musical, by breaking it, in lives which flow in natural channels, came to keep the music fresh in the Vestal's heart.

More and more mechanical became the temple services for her.

And through the monotonous syllables, which lost their meaning by repetition, more and more frequently jarred sharp interjections of doubt.

Who, what was this fire-goddess whom she served? One of a confused multitude of divinities on Olympus? Did she know who served her? Did she care? Was she good? All on Olympus were not. What was Rome to her? Or, again, was she more ancient than Olympus? Some hidden force of nature? Impersonal then, and regardless of man as the earthquake or the lightning?

This Palladium which she guarded in the sealed vase—what was it? Who had thus mysteriously bound destruction and misery with such accidents as the breaking of an earthen vase, or the extinction of a spark of

fire? The same capricious powers which sent earthquake, and lightning, and storm? and suffered the good, like her sister, to be deformed and wretched; and the bad, like so many she heard of, to be beautiful and prosperous?

What, who ruled the world? Was it ruled by some good Beings, who could not be disturbed in the divine calm of their perpetual festival by the brief woes of men? Or, rather, by some slumbering evil Beings, whom it must be the ceaseless solicitude of men not to awake to malignant vengeance by treading on some of their smallest incomprehensible caprices? Or, again, by some steady irresistible Destiny, which wove in its unresting loom, with entire indifference, the dark and the light threads, both inevitable, into the course of nature or the life of man?

In any case, what was the meaning of her ministry? Was it really serving the gods, or Rome, or any one?

Then this Rome itself, the Patria? How could she close her ears to all the dark rumours of the wickedness around her? The Vestals lived in no cloistral seclusion; they had places of honour at the gladiatorial games; and that spectacle of torture and death which, it is said no Latin author dares to defend, must have smitten with horror, at least at first, other hearts than that of Clœlia Pulchra. Moreover, she could not enter nor leave the games, nor pass through the streets, without becoming acquainted with evil unutterable.

Was this Rome indeed worth serving by such a sacrifice as her life?

And even if worth serving, might she not have served it a thousandfold better by keeping one humble home pure and warm with love, as Agrippina kept the hearth of Germanicus.

So her days passed, till her whole life sometimes seemed like a mechanical sleep-walking, the only reality in it the love of her little sister; and that love, in the unavailing pity it called forth, more than half sorrow.

With Clœlia, the deformed, there were indeed breaks enough in the daily current, sharp rebukes and reproaches, and contemptuous neglect worse than either. Yet the life being more natural, bitter as it often was, had sweeter moments. Her love for her sister also had in it far more of joy than of sorrow. Fervent, adoring, satisfied, it was at once a passion and a religion. In Clœlia she believed, she knew, she saw that "beauty and goodness and truth were real, and do exist."

The tender pensiveness which she often saw on the dear beautiful face only made it more sacred.

The doubt and darkness below, the young priestess would not for the world have betrayed.

Doubt, which is without hope of a solution, in noble natures, is silent. If it finds a voice, it is because a faint glimmering of some sunrise of Hope has touched the stony Memnon and made it speak.

Once only, when the deformed girl spoke of what the

old Jew had said of the hope of his people, did Clœlia the Vestal betray the void within.

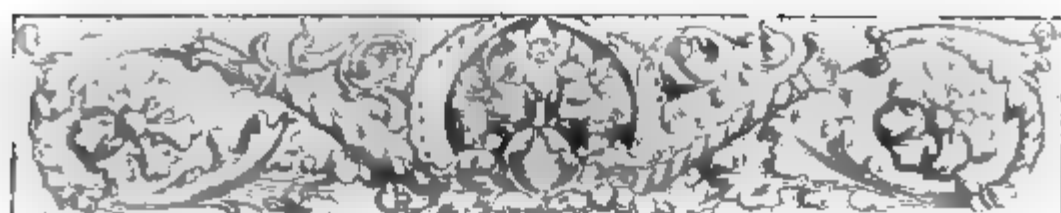
“Did the old Jew say his nation had cherished the hope for thousands of years, and that he believes it near now? Has any people in the world kept hope alive so long? Has any heart in the world a hope which grows brighter as the days wear on, and we have to see things as they are? What has fed this hope? Such a hope seems in itself a miracle. It is like a sunrise living on through the dulness of the common working-day.”

Clœlia Diodora remembered the discouraging words of Laon, his scornful warning against the Jews, and trembled at this eager reception of her words, lest by any unguarded declaration she should bring the sister she adored into contact with any evil chance. And she replied,—

“Laon said the Jews are a people of misanthropes, and probably of atheists. That is, they hate the men of all other races, and blaspheme the gods of all other men. He said they were a set of runaway slaves, who, because they had had no golden age in the past, threw it into the future. The old Jew I saw did not indeed seem to hate me. But Laon bid me beware of them and their superstition the last morning before he left. And I have not spoken to the old Jew since.”

The Vestal turned sadly away.

“A hope which makes men hate other men instead of loving them, cannot be worth much,” she said.



CHAPTER XV.

TO Siward the words of the Jewess Esther, as far as he heard them, from herself or from his mother, were like mystic oracles spoken dimly in some echoing cavern, beside the bubbling of a living fountain. They opened, as through a veil lifted for an instant and then dropped again, glimpses into unknown worlds.

Chiefly because there was a certainty in them which, amid all the confused and uncertain sounds around him, smote on his mind and conscience, as the call of a trumpet to battle amidst the vague rushing of winds, like a voice through the rolling of thunders.

This strange people, scattered everywhere, yet possessed by a patriotism intense as his own, with the Sacred Book, with the Hope of a Deliverer, attracted him irresistibly.

And now, pervading all these came another thought, which seemed to inspire all.

There was something in the tone and way in which

this Jewess uttered the name of God, entirely different from anything he had ever heard before.

It was not only that she spoke of only one God. She spoke of that One with a quiet certainty which made all the gods he had heard of before retire as into a world of shades. He could not have defined how, but it made him think of a mock sun he had once seen in a misty morning on the Northern mountains, coldly shining until the real sun rose and the mists cleared and warmed the world.

The mock sun was not nothing. If there had been no real sun, it could not have been.

The shades in the under-world were not nothing. If there had not been men, there could not be shades. But as the warm pressure to a beating human heart to the empty meeting of arms folded in a vain embrace around those dim forms—as the ringing tones of a living human voice to the attempted sounds dying on those gasping lips—so seemed to him the God of this Esther the Jewess to any god he had ever known of before.

It was not often she uttered the name. It was scarcely with love, only always with a quiet certainty of His living as really as any she spoke to were living ; a sense of an inevitable, unchangeable relationship to Him, and a conviction that He had spoken to men.

Other gods might be spoken about, perhaps spoken to. This God had spoken. And with irresistible longing Siward wanted to learn what, and to whom.

Esther, and even Onias, seemed to walk with a freer step and a higher bearing from the moment they first trod the soil of Judæa.

“We are going to the City and the House of our God,” Esther said, and her eyes kindled.

And all day, as they rode among the corn-fields and the orange-gardens of the maritime plain, or among the vineyards and olive-groves of the terraced hill-sides, her lips were murmuring fragments of the ancient songs of her people. Strangely different from the songs and legends of all other people, in this,—that through all the battle songs and the strains of mournful or exulting patriotism, through all the stories of tender domestic love or of heroic sacrifice, penetrates one living Name, pervading, deepening, inspiring all. Jerusalem is not the Sacred City only—it is the “City of our God ;” Zion is the perfection of beauty, for out of Zion God hath shined ; it is not the Temple and its services chiefly for which the singer’s heart sighs : “As the hart panteth for the water brooks, my heart panteth for *Thee*, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God ?”

All the day, as they slowly descended into the valleys or climbed the rocky hills, a solemnity seemed to deepen over the Jewish woman. She scarcely spoke to any one ; and at length, when the last separating range was crossed, and the towers and palaces and massive bulwarks, and, above all, the lofty façade of the Temple,

came in sight she alighted from the ass she was riding, stretched out her arms, then clasped her hands together as in prayer, and wept.

She was a daughter of Jerusalem ; but she had not seen the city since her childhood. Her father, now an aged man in Rome, and her mother, long since dead, had led her childish feet along those streets, and taught her to bend in prayer within those sacred courts. Her parents were among the few not spoken of in any history, Latin or Greek or Jewish, save in the one history which is occupied, not with princes and states, but with God and man. They were of those who had waited in Jerusalem for God, and One whom He would send.

Onias also dismounted and walked beside her. He also had been saying long prayers through the day ; but his mind was too full of the results of his negotiations with Laon not to confide them to her.

“ Esther,” he said, “ it is written, the Gentiles shall be our ploughmen and our bondsmen. It is fulfilled this day, in a figure. This old Greek is an armourer of the first quality. He is to establish an armoury at Antioch, his native city, where for the present we are to abide. I shall take his wares on the most advantageous terms. At length I have arranged all. I can have sale to any extent for such weapons among our own people.”

“ Is there not risk in such trade ? ” she said, trying to bring back her thoughts to meet his. “ Will not the Roman soldiers hinder it ? ”

“Risk there may be,” he said loftily, but lowering his voice. “What great good is to be gained without risk? But our people may have use for arms the Gentiles will neither like nor hinder. For Israel, is it not worth while to run some risk? Was there no risk to Gideon, or to David the king? Besides,” he added, as if to himself, “the profits are something out of the common way; I am afraid to tell thee what they may be. This Greek cannot get on without my help, and naturally he must pay for it. Thou mayest live like a princess.”

“I am no princess, Onias,” she said; “not even the humblest mother in Israel,” she added, with irrepressible sadness. “What are gold and silver to me?”

“Have I ever murmured at that?” he said, with an altered tone. “He gave, and He hath taken away.”

“No, no,” she said; “thou hast not murmured. It is I who have murmured and sinned, and brought the curse on thee. If only He had taken the silver and the gold, and left the babes!”

“Silver and gold had we none the less needed had the babes been left,” he said, in a tone of rebuke, half dreading what judgment might follow a wish in his eyes so profane. “Gold is good, come when it may; let us not forget to praise God, therefore. He is the Giver of all; and praise is acceptable to Him.”

Accustomed as she was, in her husband, to the inextricable confusion of love of country with a half-bargain-

ing, half-trembling religion, his words did not surprise her. She attempted no reply, and they entered the gates of Jerusalem in silence.

The city was magnificent with the buildings of the great builder, Herod the Great. He had died only twenty years before ; and the freshness of tint and of cutting had not passed from the stone walls of the great amphitheatre which he had excavated and built outside the walls.

Onias, from his Pharisaic adherence to the ancient law, and Esther, with her worship of the living Lawgiver, looked with equal horror on these signs of Gentile dominion. (Gentile *culture* that could scarcely be called, which was to be promoted by the sanguinary conflicts of the amphitheatre outside the walls, or the unhallowed exhibitions of the theatre within.)

“Your people,” said Laon to Onias, “rose in insurrection, it is said, in the days of Herod the Great, because he set up empty suits of armour around the theatre. Is this true ?”

“It is true,” replied Onias, his eyes kindling. “And they did well ; our law forbids such idolatrous usages. They also did well and died well,—the young men who were burned alive for tearing down the image of an eagle which the king had dared to set up over the Temple gate. The men were burned alive ; but the eagle has never been replaced. The Holy City is desecrated by no idols. The Roman governors themselves venture not

to profane it by bringing their idolatrous standards within its gates. The troops are quartered at the new city of Cæsar, not in the City of David."

"A golden eagle might have attractions to the most pious crowds," suggested Laon, sarcastically; "the gold, if not the image. It could doubtless be melted down, as your ancestors, I think, melted down the golden ornaments of the Egyptians; only, if I mistake not, they did not use them in a way your Lawgiver approved. There is a story of a golden calf, made long before the days of these Romans."

"Our people sinned and suffered," said Onias, gravely. "For this they were led into captivity in Babylon; but since the restoration they have never sinned thus again."

"Never sinned thus, indeed?" remarked Laon. "I see—you people are wiser. It displeases their Lawgiver to have the gold molten into a calf or an eagle; therefore they melt it into gold pieces. They are wise: gold pieces buy Gentile wares, and can be worshipped without transgressing the law."

Onias turned aside to the minor accusation.

"We do not worship the gold pieces. In Judæa we suffer not even the image of the Emperor to be stamped on our Jewish coins. The Roman governors respect our belief. We would die rather than consent to have idolatrous symbols set up within the walls of Jerusalem."

It was true. The Roman governors knew it: and old Laon knew it.

“ You are a wonderful people,” he said, more respectfully ; “ loving money as you do, to love something you call your Divine Law better. And yet it is said your law is as strong in insisting on mercy and in forbidding unfair dealing as in denouncing images. Are there no oppressed poor and no hard bargains within the walls of your Sacred City ? ”

“ We are not what we should be in the eyes of our God,” said Onias, gravely. “ If we were,” he added, bitterly, “ we should not be what we are in the eyes of man. Not the Temple only should be undefiled by Gentile feet ; not Jerusalem only should be untrodden by Roman legions. Not a foot of the uncircumcised should enter within our borders except to serve our people and to adore our God.”

Laon did not pursue the subject. He turned away, and left the Jews together. But after a long silence, he said to Callias and Siward, as they rode together by Herod’s amphitheatre,—

“ When will some one rise against these Romans—not for setting up images of the gods, but for mangling the divinest images we have of the gods between the teeth and claws of beasts ? These Jews make insurrection against what they call idolatry,—when will there be an insurrection against cruelty ? So many altars to Power, and only one in the world to Pity ! ”



CHAPTER XVI.

ONIAS and Esther found a lodging in one of the garden-towers on the Mount of Olives, the City being crowded with worshippers who had come up to the Feast of the Passover. Fairer to the eye than ever before or since was Jerusalem then, enthroned on the edge of the hills, guarded by deep ravines. Some said that the architectural magnificence of the City exceeded that of Rome. The lines of the flat roofs were broken by the towers of Herod's palaces and fortresses, and by the lofty, richly-decorated Front of the Temple itself.

From the window of their garden-tower on Olivet, Esther and Onias looked down that soft spring evening on groves of ancient olives, their silvery gray interspersed with the fresh green of fig-trees; and on glossy shrubberies of myrtle, broken by the lofty tops of the sweeping cedars and by the feathery crowns of palms.

The footpath and the high road to Bethany wound down among the gardens into the hollow of the Kedron at their feet, dark then with the purple shadows of even-

ing. From these shadows rose the beautiful mountain-city, dazzling with all her stately new buildings, sacred with all her ancient associations—as yet desecrated, and hallowed, by no Dolorous Way.

To the eyes of Onias and Esther, all these princely castle-towers—all the columned cloisters, snow-white with fresh marble, or touched to a golden glow by the sun—all the gilded roofs—were merely so many appendages or testimonies of homage to the Sanctuary on the edge of the ravine ; still retaining, in spite of Herod's towering Front and golden roofs, the likeness of the old sacred Tent of the Wilderness, around which their fathers had gathered.

The materials, and the art with which it was built, were of little moment to the Jewish pilgrims. To Onias it was the sanctuary of his race : to Esther it was the House of her God. As they looked they could almost discern the white-robed companies of priests moving about the cloistered courts in preparation for the Feast. But Esther said sorrowfully,—

“ My father used to say this Temple, with its golden roofs and precious marbles, was poor and bare indeed compared, not with the Temple of Solomon, but with the ancient Tent in the Wilderness, covered with badger skins ; for on that the Cloud of Glory rested, and in its Holy of Holies abode the Ark, the cherubim shadowing the mercy-seat. When will the Shechinah return ? ”

“ It is ours to slay the sacrifices and purify the sacred

vessels," Onias replied. "God only can fill the vessels or send down the Cloud."

"But oh, what sacrifices, Onias!" she said. "Old words, which my father used to read, keep ringing through my heart: 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?' 'Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me.' 'Your appointed feasts My soul hateth: I am weary to bear them.' Weary to bear them, Onias, so many ages ago! What then now? Are we indeed bringing Him what He asks for, what He cares to have? The cry of violence and strife is in the City. Marble palaces, gilded roofs, feasting and splendour; and amidst it all the cry of the poor and the wronged! There is an oppression on my heart. It seems as if the prayers reached no further than the golden roofs, but the cries to the Throne in heaven."

"How can I help it?" Onias replied impatiently; "I at least have spared no cost. I have given alms enough into the Temple treasury to provide a Passover Feast for a score of poor families. I would have given more, but that I feared to make people suspect that poor old Onias was after all richer than he seemed. We have a journey to make after the Feast; and not all that come up to the Passover come to sacrifice or to pray."

For the next week the City was full of feasting. It was the great national festival. Of old their ancestors had partaken of the lamb and the bitter herbs standing,

with girded loins, like slaves not yet liberated. Now the poorest Jew reclined at the board "like a king and a freeman." The streets were full of pilgrims, chiefly men. It was a festival which the Romans watched with anxiety, and with which they did not attempt to interfere. We know that they even professed to honour it, by pardoning a criminal, "whomsoever the people would." Among all the festive crowds not a Roman soldier was to be found.

Old Laon watched the motley company which thronged the narrow streets and clustered in the porticoes and open courts with curious interest. For the time all intercourse had been suspended between him and his new Jewish acquaintances.

Onias dreaded ceremonial pollution, with its attendant inconveniences and expenses ; and Esther was absorbed in the devotions and the sacred memories of the Festival, and in making it as much as she could a festival to some of the poor families who had come up from the country districts, from the forests of Galilee and the hill-country of the South.

Morning after morning, Laon used to walk up and down the Royal Porch of the Temple, through the three magnificent aisles of Corinthian columns, the stately cloister large and lofty as the nave of one of our noblest cathedrals.

"It might be a Temple!" he said. "And it is only a Porch for us who dare not enter the Temple."

For beyond this magnificent entrance no heathen feet might venture. Just within it rose the richly ornamented stone barrier, with its inscription warning off profane feet. Onias and Esther passed them often at a distance, and entered from the shadows into the light of the sacred courts—he into the Court of the Men, she into the Court of the Women, separated by the long flights of marble steps and the Beautiful Gate from the inner courts.

“A strange people,” Laon said to Siward and Callias. “See how they despise us, and see how these Romans cringe to them! Not a temple in the world but would be honoured by the homage of one of Cæsar’s legates. In this Temple the presence of Cæsar himself would be regarded as an intolerable desecration. The poorest of these beggarly Jews may enter, and the Emperor must keep at a lowly distance outside. And the Romans submit.”

“Yet they scarcely seem one people,” Callias said. “See how different their costume is, and even their speech and their complexions. Polished Alexandrians, talking Greek as fluently as any Athenian—strangers, burned nearly black, from Africa—Oriental merchants from Babylon or Persia; and among them these half-starved wild men in white clothing, ascetics from their villages by the Dead Sea—these Pharisees with their sanctimonious looks, dreading to touch us with the hem of their garments—these poor peasants, ill clad, with hands hard

with toil—fishermen from Galilee—husbandmen from the South—shepherds from the Eastern hills. All these sweep past us through the gate we dare not enter, into their own Sanctuary. Surely this is a score of nations, not one nation. What have they in common?”

“They have this in common,” said Laon, “that scattered as they are voluntarily through every city in the world where there is trade to be done, every one of them is bound to every other by a tie such as binds together no nation on earth, not even some remote mountain tribe which has never seen an invader. Elastic to stretch to the ends of the earth, it binds every one of them to this City, this Sanctuary, and to each other.”

“What is the tie?” asked Callias.

“A common contempt of other races; a common enthusiasm for their own; a common history contained in a Book which they look on as Divine; a common Hope, which they also look on as Divine; common festivals, which commemorate national deliverances, drawing them to the Common Temple. Their lawgiver must have been a great patriot and statesman, this Moses in whom they trust. I always thought them a wonderful and inexplicable people. But now, first, at Jerusalem, I begin to understand the Jews.”

Yet Siward, walking in silence beside Laon and Callias had gained, through the faith of Esther, a glimpse into the true nature of the bond which united the Jewish nation, deeper than Laon's.

He had seen afar off a dim vision of the Fountain of Living Waters, whence flowed the Book with its History, the Hope with its inspiration, the intense, unconquerable Patriotism.

For he had found a Jewish heart which believed in the Living God.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE Passover Festival was over. The tens of thousands of pilgrims who had crowded within the walls of Jerusalem, or found a resting-place, like Onias and Esther, in the garden-lodges or vineyard-towers on the hills around, were slowly dispersing, streaming out of every gate, and along every road and footpath, to their homes in distant lands or among the cities and villages of Judæa and Galilee.

Onias lingered later in Jerusalem than the majority of the pilgrims, until Laon became eager to depart, and Callias, especially, grew impatient to escape from a city in which a statue was regarded as a profanation.

Once more, at last, the little company was gathered. Laon and Onias, and the women, Siguna and Esther, with little Hilda, on asses, Siward and Callias on foot.

Across the brook Kedron, then full, and murmuring over its stony bed—up the steep path to Bethany, bordered with spring flowers, and shaded with leafy fig-trees—among the olive-groves, through fragrant thickets

of flowering myrtle, while from time to time across the way fell the delicate feathered shadow of a cluster of palms.

Pathetic memories of David the king, with covered head, fleeing from Absalom, were in Esther's heart.

"O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

It was no mere echo which those words awakened in her heart. Her whole being vibrated in response. She knew well how much they meant; and how little; how "to die," is reversed in meaning when the dearest have died; how sweet it would have been to have followed her babes whithersoever they had gone; to have been laid, like them, in the Catacombs under the hills of Rome, "in peace;" like them, to have taken the wings of a dove and flown away, and remained in the wilderness, and been at rest. For, "wilderness" as the world beyond still was to her, a dark land and unknown, she knew, notwithstanding, that all worlds were full of God; and what her beloved had gone to—dark or bright—she longed to share.

To Onias nearer memories were more present. The familiar stories of his boyhood had been of the martyrdoms of his people by Antiochus; of the heroic mother who exhorted her sons to be tortured, and saw them suffer, refusing to accept deliverance at the price of

apostasy; of the enthusiastic patriotism reawakened in the wars of the Maccabean brothers. Or, nearer still, two tragedies pressed on his memory, which had been stamped on his boyish imagination by frequent repetition until they were as vivid to him as anything he had seen.

In those fair courts and terraces, now girt with Herod's dazzling cloisters, which lay spread before him as he turned back for a last look from the summit of Olivet, the priests of his people had calmly continued the appointed sacrifices for the nation, while Pompey's engines were battering down the towers. Down the precipitous sides of that ravine they had been hurled when unable further to defend the Temple, which was at once the citadel of the people and their sanctuary.

He remembered how in his youth his heart had thrilled with the sense that he would have done and suffered the same.

But now another scene came back to him with even greater vividness.

In that city, during the ceaseless civil wars which had followed the division of Alexander's empire, one old man named Onias had lived a life so high and humble, and so apart from strife, that his prayers were believed to have power like Elijah's, and those who had no ambition for his holiness coveted his intercessions.

One of the contending factions—both Jewish—dragged him from his home to pray against the other.

But the old man had not learned to turn prayers into curses. Quietly he knelt down among the excited mob and prayed aloud: "O God, King of the universe, since on one side are Thy people, and on the other Thy priests, I beseech Thee hear not the prayers of either to the injury of the other."

The cries of the enraged partisans drowned his voice; the stones fell thick around the gray head; the feeble life was easily bruised out of the aged frame, and he fell, one of the few martyrs the world has seen to mercy.

Among the dark memories of massacre and murder which haunted those valleys and hills, of eight hundred crucified at once outside those walls, of assassination and fratricidal slaughter, the memory of that old man dying, among the stones, for peace, rose before the Pharisee, and for a moment pierced a way for the daylight through the anxious cares which were gradually walling in his soul.

"If our sons had lived," he said to Esther, "we might well have yielded them to such a death as that of this Onias."

Dusk began to fall when they had crossed the ridge, ere they reached the village of Bethany, in the valley below among the palms and olives.

Laon wished to remain for the night in the shelter of the village. But Onias refused. The next day was the Sabbath, and he had determined to reach the inn among the hills, half-way on the road to Jericho, so as to bring

the next day's travelling within the legal limit of the Sabbath-day's journey.

Both the old men were immovable. Onias would have yielded anything but a ritual observance for the sake of the protection of companions. And Laon would have yielded to anything but what he considered a Jewish superstition. So the Jew and the Jewess journeyed on alone, whilst Laon and the Germans camped by the village fountain for the night.

They had not been long out of sight, when on the silence of the evening broke faint distant cries for help. Siward was the first to hear them, and with Callias, and one or two villagers, he pressed on along the wild and lonely road.

It was some time before they reached the place whence came the cries. The reverberation of the rocky steep had carried the sound far.

Onias and Esther had indeed fallen among thieves on the wild mountain road to Jericho, with its easy retreat to the desert—that road which thieves have haunted persistently for thousands of years;—and when Siward came to the spot, the fierce war-cry of the followers of Judas of Galilee, "We have no Master or Lord but God," echoed among the rocks from a sentinel who was posted in advance to warn the rest.

On the approach of the rescue, shouting and clashing their arms, the robbers sprang on their horses and fled, leaving their victims free. But Siward found old Onias

too bewildered and distressed to be grateful to his deliverers. At the first moment he did not recognize them, but cried out the more, deeming them to be a fresh band of plunderers.

"I have no more to give," he said in Syriac, wringing his hands. "They have taken all. Do with me what you will. They have taken the savings of my life. Take life too if you will."

"I had little to lose, sirs," he resumed, recovering himself as he recognized his friends—"little to lose; but it was my all."

But from a rock above came a shout of derision.

"This will teach thee not to lean on an arm of Gentile flesh, brother! Thanks for thy contribution to our sacred cause. Thy coat weighs heavy, and thou wilt travel light without it. Gold thrown into the treasury is never lost. Sow on, old man; sow again, that the faithful may reap."

Callias listened, not without a little malicious amusement.

Siward was occupied in restoring Esther to consciousness. She had fallen and been stunned. But Onias sat wringing his hands, too dejected to care for anything.

"Esther, my beloved," were his first words to her when she recovered, "would to Heaven we had both died! The gold is gone, all, not a piece left. Not one piece! And I had thought one day to array thee like Esther the queen, and to serve the nation therewith."

She smiled tenderly at the delusion. But the loss seemed to have added years to his age. And she returned to the village supporting on her arm a feeble, tottering old man.

"Who would have thought it! Who would have thought it!" he kept murmuring to himself. "The Lord has indeed forsaken His people. Was I not incurring the danger in His service? Is Israel nothing to Him—or His own Sabbaths? Our God has forsaken us, Esther. What have we done? Persecute and take them, for God hath forsaken them."

"It is not God who hath forsaken us," she said, "it is only the gold."

But he shook his head, and was not to be comforted.

Yet in her own heart his words found a deeper echo than she would let him see.

Thenceforth throughout the journey Siguna observed that the positions of Onias and Esther seemed reversed. Esther rose from her dejection to comfort him. Feeble and sad as she was, she had become the protector, watching and cherishing him with a pitiful motherly tenderness. But to Siguna, one evening, the anguish which lay at the root of all this tenderness came out.

"Oh, German mother!" she said, "he was noble once, kind and generous, when the children were with us. It is I who have brought this change and curse on him. For my sins, God took the babes. For their sakes, first the gold grew precious to him; they, yet a thousandfold

more precious. But since they died his heart has twined around the gold. He is no base miser," she added passionately ; "never believe it. He loves the gold for the power he sees in it to help. He sees it glorified with all the love and hopes which once gathered round it. Money is not only the idol of the mean. It is the idol of the hopeless. And sometimes I think if our people lost the great Hope, it might become the idol of our race."

Siward was listening. She turned to him, and said,—

"Worship any idol but that. Other idols can be broken. This never. Its destruction only makes it dearer. For it is always in the distance before us ; a symbol of power, power to do what we will for ourselves and others. "When we reach this point," the worshippers say, "or that—or that !" But the point at which to use it is never reached. We lie down in the dust, and the hand which meant to have used the gold is as powerless as the gold it meant to use. Yet the delusion dies not. Dust to us, it is still a symbol of irresistible power to those who take it from our dead hands. Alas ! this curse and this delusion are on him. But my sins brought it on him ; mine !"

Siward looked into the pure patient face, and exclaimed involuntarily,—

"Thy sins ! What could they have been ?"

"I coveted gold first for the babes," she said ; "and then the babes died, and he still coveted the gold for itself."

"Underneath the Jewish Temple also, then," thought Siward, "as deep in the heart of the rock beneath the temples of Athens, yawns the cave of the Eumenides, of the avenging goddesses who cannot be appeased or evaded. Everywhere these are dreaded ;—are these then the strongest ?"

But he said,—

"Your God also, then, does not forgive !"

She was silent a moment. Then a faint light broke over her countenance.

"It is written, 'There is forgiveness with Thee !'" she said. "It is possible that He may be punishing, and yet forgiving ; punishing, that He may be able to forgive. In this hope I live."

By degrees Onias rallied, and began to follow the advice of the robber, "Sow on, sow on again." His mind had run so long in the grooves of commercial calculation, that when left to itself it seemed to calculate mechanically. Before they had left Jericho, with its rose and balsam gardens, shaded on its burning plain by the groves of young palm-trees planted by Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, he had recommenced negotiations with Laon ; and by the time they reached the shores of the Lake of Galilee he had contrived a scheme for the sale of arms, which would, he trusted, in no distant future restore the losses of the past.

The villages which bordered the fertile shores of

that inland sea seemed to him storehouses of future profit.

“These Galileans are always turbulent,” he said to Esther one evening, as they walked along the shingly shore; “before long some new Judas of Gamala is sure to arise. The sight of this new Tiberias of the Idumæan, desecrated with Gentile images and a Roman name, its gilded roofs and white porticoes shining over the waters,—is it not enough to excite them? Arms are sure to be welcome; and prohibited wares can only be safely purchased of a fellow-countryman, himself a Jewish patriot. These hardy fishermen, moreover, not a few of them are small capitalists. They possess more than one boat. And the lake is a storehouse of wealth inexhaustible. Fish without end; corn-fields which yield crop after crop; vineyards and olive-groves on every hill, date-palms on the plain; orchards of citrons and pomegranates bathed by the lake;—a market at hand in this new city, profane as it is. This land is as the Garden of Eden, Esther. Let us never despond. Some day, who can say what Deliverer may arise for this Paradise? Judas of Gamala all but succeeded. His followers survive. The Maccabees came from the north. No one knew of them till they arose. Who knows what may be preparing among these hills even now. This is just the country for a mighty man to arise from. A Paradise to save. The Edomite to dispossess, the traitor flaunting his new Gentile city in the very face of Israel. Wild

solitary wildernesses at hand across the water, such as Elijah was trained in. Who knows how near the deliverance may be! Let us do our part. Let us purchase and sell them the best arms these Gentiles can make, and leave the issue to the Lord of sabaoth."

That evening they watched the three stars unveil themselves from the daylight, marking that the Sabbath had begun.

They rested that Sabbath-day in one of the villages on the shores of the lake, Onias having refused to lodge within the "Gentile and polluted city of Tiberias."

They entered a synagogue with a Corinthian portico, built, it was said, by a Roman soldier, a proselyte.

Esther sat among the women. Onias was offered the scroll of the Law, and asked to read.

Eagerly she leaned forward and listened, as the words came,—

"Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

Like the words of a song in a foreign language, almost sweeter for being half understood, the wonderful portrait penetrated her heart.

A Sufferer so beloved of God, what a consecration for all suffering!

And further on, the tender words of the prophet stole in like balm,—

"The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit.

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.”

She heard no more.

Her heart seemed to rise beyond its own sorrows and hopelessness to the sorrow and the undying Hope of her people.

“It must come!” she sang in her heart. “He must come; the Anointed, the King! Who knows how near His footsteps may be? Did Israel know Saul till he was anointed? Did his brethren know David even after he was anointed? Who knows but, if our ears were opened, we might hear those footsteps even now—even here?”

About a day's journey from them, among the western hills, lay the village of Nazareth.

But who thought of turning aside to see an obscure mountain village, not of the best reputation?

No highway of commerce led through it. No patriotic memories gathered round it.

Even if they had passed through its upland streets, they might have seen nothing remarkable in the carpenter's workshop there.

That night Esther could not sleep. A sudden storm burst on the lake through the ravines of the mountains.

The white surges gleamed through the night as the waves broke on the shingly beaches or dashed on the cliffs. She sat crouching on the flat house-top under the shelter of a little booth which had been erected for them, and looked out on the storm, until the day began to break; and then leaning over the low parapet, she watched one solitary fishing-boat struggling with the storm; now all but hidden under the waves, then emerging, tossed on the white crests, until at last it reached the shore, dashed high on a sandy creek, and left there half a wreck, sails torn, masts broken, but safe.

Slowly the wind lulled, the clouds vanished, and the sun rose behind the long ridge of the eastern table-land; the sky was "set with fair colours," and the sea shone like a translucent sapphire.

The tangle of images, clustered and intertwined like the rich vegetation below her on the plain of Gennesaret, in the prophecies she had heard yesterday in the synagogue, came back to her mind, unfolded by the scene before her.

The Ship tossed in the tempests of the stormy world, dissolving into the City set with sapphires and fair colours; when and where would the transformation be? Were the tempests for earth, and the fair colours all for heaven? Or was the Dawn even now ready to break on the earth?

So she mused watching by the Sea of Galilee.

And that same night, in the Temple by the Roman

Forum, Clœlia the Vestal was keeping the sacred fire for her people, her heart also faintly stirred by the tremulous murmurs of the morning of which that age was full.

For the burden of the wickedness of the City on the Seven Hills weighed more and more heavily on her as she understood it more.

And around the few who watched and prayed lay the great multitudes of the slumbering, revelling, suffering world, on whom no hope had yet dawned.

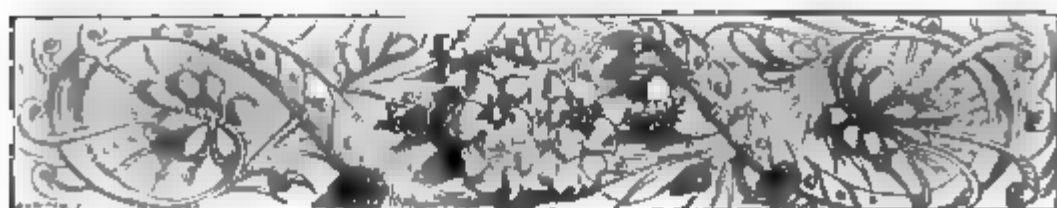
The hope of the few who looked upward, the hopelessness of the many whom no one had taught to look upward, the universal night of corruption, the uncertain broken murmurs of aspiration from earnest hearts below, the limited but surely growing light of the earlier Revelation from above,—all were betokening the breaking of the Day.

To us who have seen it break !

But not yet to those who were still in the twilight.

The morning and the evening twilight are always hard to be distinguished, by creatures of an hour, whose life is not long enough to see it either begin or end.





CHAPTER XVIII.

ANTIOCH, the third City in the World, the beautiful city, the joyous city, was full of the stir of festivity from end to end. Cæsar Germanicus had been laid low by dangerous sickness. He was believed to have recovered, and Antioch, the metropolis of the East, and the residence of the Roman Legate, was pouring out her hundreds of thousands to sacrifice at the altars on the hill-sides for the health of the young Cæsar.

In that delicious climate, living in the open air, under the shadow of the countless porticoes, or in the race-course and theatres, the idle crowds which thronged the long, broad streets at all times, had only to be stirred by a common impulse in one direction, and the beautiful city became at once the stage of a brilliant and picturesque procession.

Graceful Greeks, lithe Syrians, stately Persians, in all the rich colouring of Oriental costume, glanced in and out of the shadow of the long colonnades. Among them priests with victims, white oxen garlanded, groups of

dancers led by cymbals, trumpets, and flutes, choruses of triumphal or comic singers, trooped joyously along the long street towards Epidaphne. Along the league-long street, bordered by a marble colonnade with three aisles, they went ; flowers from the luxuriant gardens showered around their steps, jests flying on all sides among that quick-witted populace (remarkable for its faculty of bestowing characteristic *soubriquets*) ; by the swift Orontes to the fragrant gardens on the hills, musical with streams, and populous with temples and statues of gods and nymphs ; many of the mortal men and women in the procession, themselves, with their white flowing robes and athletic supple forms trained in the race-course and the circus, as beautiful and graceful as any statue of their gods.

A miracle of beauty the city was that summer day with the river girdling it like a silver girdle, the white arches of aqueducts and bridges, and the porticoes of palaces and Basilicas, reflected in the waters, or shining among the dark foliage ; and all guarded by the walls and towers which scaled the steeps and crowned the heights. Beyond, the rich plain, the blue mountains, sources of cool streams ; over all the glorious sunshine, bringing out every detail of architecture and sculpture like delicate ivory carving, and steeping every colour in a golden glow ; and through all, the stir of a multitude united for the moment into the true life of a city by a common deliverance and a common joy.

Suddenly the festivities were checked. The priests

had reached the altars at Epidaphne with the victims, and were commencing the sacrificial rites, when the lictors of Piso, the envious colleague of Germanicus, burst on them, chased away the priests and the garlanded sacrificial oxen with blows and menaces, and dispersed the procession, leaving the astonished people to discuss in broken groups what this division among their Roman rulers might mean or portend.

The festivities which had united the mob into a multitude, thus broken, Antioch resolved itself again into its elements : elements probably as base and corrupt as have ever been gathered together in any one place.

Romans delivered from the restraints of Roman duty, Greek mythology transplanted without any of its higher associations, degraded into a mere light tissue of legend, or associated with the fierce and licentious Syrian nature-worship, native to the place. The decaying religions of all nations mouldering together in a common corruption, a luxurious soil for the vices of all nations to flourish in. Art sunk into a mere appendage of luxury. Nothing serious, but a dark Oriental magic, supposed to be mighty in love-potions or murderous spells ; and the sordid pursuit of wealth. Riches enough to purchase anything ; and nothing too sacred to be sold. An aristocracy of mere riches, without patriotism or faith or family honour ; a populace such as such an aristocracy creates.

Old Laon was disturbed at having recommended the place to the German captives.

“There is no quarter of the city fit for a good woman like your mother or a young maiden like your sister to live in,” he said to Siward, “except among these hateful Jews, who swarm here, as everywhere else where their honey is to be gathered. They are a set of bigots and misers. But it must be confessed they have retained some relics of family purity. And they alone.”

A stronger reprobation could not pass Laon's lips. “For myself,” he added, “I find here a few who love wisdom, and a great many who can talk fine rhetoric about philosophy. But women want their philosophy on fire with religion of some kind. And here the fire of religion and the fire of iniquity are the same.





CHAPTER XIX.

THE brief gleam of delusive hope as to the restoration of Germanicus had faded away ; and in his home near Antioch, among the gardens of Epidaphne, the young Cæsar lay dying. The pure home of Agrippina and Germanicus was strangely set ; an island of purity in that enchanted forest of license and revelry.

It was October. But the seasons made little difference in the paradise in the midst of which he was sojourning.

Summer could not silence the music of the hundred fountains welling up from their deep rocky sources beneath the hills. Autumn laid a scarcely perceptible touch on the glossy foliage of its forests, miles in depth, of ilexes, laurels, and bays, or on the dark masses of its cypresses and cedars. The white marble Temple, in whose jewelled sanctuary the statue of Apollo stretched out arms of perpetual longing for a human love, was surrounded by depths of evergreen shade, the perpetually

renewed freshness of grass and flowers, and the music of ceaseless revelries.

But for Germanicus this world had no light or music any more.

Dark suspicions haunted his sick-bed. The beautiful temples shining amidst the dark foliage, the dances, the processions, the luxurious festivities among the fragrant gardens—all vanished before the terrors of the great Shadow. The dark chasm of superstitious fear which lay beneath all the brilliant gossamers, beneath all the song and dance and festival of that old Pagan faith, yawned before Germanicus in all its blackness.

To him the flowery Epidaphne was no paradise of joyous worship, but a sunny portal to the world of shadows. The true shrines of Antioch were to the powers of the under-world; her true worship was a mighty malignant magic; the white porticoes of her temples were the threshold of a cave darker far than that of the Eumenides beneath the rocky hills of Athens: for the powers ruling there were no avengers of wrong, steadfast and stern, but abettors of wrong, capricious and unstable, at the beck and call of any malignant heart which was sufficiently like them to propitiate them with the cruel rites they loved.

To Cæsar Germanicus, as he watched his own life slowly and inevitably ebbing away, the world of life and of death must have seemed given over to beings whose nearest types were beasts of prey, ready to fawn on any

one who would indulge them with enough blood and cruel sport.

That age, with its light scepticism on the surface, and its despairing unbelief below, was an age of faith in magic, and of feverish curiosity to obtain glimpses into the future and the unseen; and the pure life of Germanicus was not free from these superstitious terrors. His own persuasion that poison was given him by Piso is said to have heightened the relentless violence of the disease. But the poison which he most dreaded was not any mere drug which might work by ordinary means on the body. It was an age in which wives were brought before grave tribunals for administering potions to their husbands which subtly dethroned reason. "And on the floors and walls of Piso's chambers," it was related, "were found the exhumed remains of human bodies, with charms and spells, and the name of Germanicus engraven on sheets of lead; carcasses half burned, besmeared with gore, and other instruments of sorceries wherewith souls were thought to be doomed to the gods of the underworld."

Germanicus had written a letter from his sick-room solemnly "renouncing the friendship of Piso," and, it was said, commanding him to depart the province; in spite of which Piso was hovering near, like a bird of prey, watching the dying agonies of his victim.

But the most earnest thoughts of Germanicus were for his wife and her six children.

The world above, on which his eyes were closing, was, he knew too well, the empire of Tiberius Cæsar, ever envious and suspicious of him, whose chief ministers were informers, living on the blood of those whom they betrayed.

What reason was there to hope that the unseen world below, to which he was going, would be more justly and evenly ruled than the seen? It seemed to be the empire of Powers envious and capricious, whose favourite rites were magic and murder. The Powers who suffered Tiberius to reign, and Piso and Plancina to prosper on earth, would scarcely be more tolerable in their own immediate dominions. Soon he would be wandering aimlessly among the dark gods of that lower world. Of that it was useless to think. No wisdom or goodness availed there, or, at all events, no rules which human creatures could comprehend as wise and good.

But Agrippina and their children would be still on earth. There, even under the dominion of Tiberius, Justice might at intervals make her voice heard; or, at the worst, prudence and patience might be of some avail.

To the few friends who were gathered around him he committed, as his dying injunction, the sacred duty of avenging his death.

And touching the hand of the dying prince, they swore they would forego their lives sooner than their revenge.

For Agrippina he had other counsels. The lofty courage, the imperial stateliness, the severe purity of life, the chaste fervour of affection, which had become her as the wife of the Conqueror, the mother of Cæsars, the grand-daughter of Augustus, would avail her nothing now. He conjured her, "by her remembrance of him, by the children who belonged to them both, to lay aside her indignant passion, and bow her spirit to Fortune, now enraged against him; and on her return to Rome, not to irritate those who were stronger than herself, by striving for the mastery."

"So much openly. And more in secret." It was believed that above all other enemies he warned her to dread Tiberius, under whose suspicious eyes henceforth she and her children would have to live, with no mediator between; with no Refuge, that Germanicus knew, above.

And soon afterwards—the last effort of his expiring strength spent in caring for her and his children—he died.

With Tiberius Cæsar reigning upon earth, where he was leaving all he loved, and the Powers Piso had propitiated by magic reigning in that dark lower world he saw before him, it could have been no easy thing for Germanicus to die.

As hard almost for him to die, as for Agrippina to live!

Once more the people of Antioch were gathered together for a solemn rite.

It was night.

The princely form of the young Cæsar was borne, on the imperial couch of ivory draped with purple, from the gardens of Epidaphne, through the streets to the Forum of Antioch.

There, on the square pile of wood, as on an altar, the funeral couch was laid.

The pyre was lit, as usual, by the nearest in blood, with face averted; the perfumes were sprinkled; the flames leaped up around the dead prince, and lit up with their capricious flickering glow the faces of the multitude, for the moment stricken into silence. In a few minutes no visible sign of Germanicus was left, save a few ashes mingled with perfumes and moistened with a libation of wine.

There was little pomp in the ceremony. The images of his long line of ancestry were far away in Rome; and there was no funeral procession, no solemn marching of the troops around the pyre, no emancipation of slaves.

All his children except two—one of them the infant born a few months since at Lesbos—were then at Rome. And in Syria, it was possible the imperial authority might devolve on the mortal enemy, appointed by Tiberius, who had so relentlessly pursued his steps, and contravened his orders.

Piso and Plancina, still lingering among the Grecian seas at the Isle of Cos, were overjoyed at the tidings of his death; made public sacrifices in the temples; threw

off the mourning which they had been wearing for a family bereavement ; accused Germanicus, in a letter to Tiberius, of luxury and insolence ; and hastily collecting an army of deserters and malcontents, returned to the coasts of Syria.

The public mourning for Germanicus came later.

Meantime, among the numbers who recalled the dignity and courtesy of his bearing ; the princely generosity which delighted in giving to the needy ; the nobler generosity which had been so prompt in rescuing his worst enemy from shipwreck ; the courteous regard for the customs and beliefs of other races, so graceful in one whose station raised him above criticism, and so rare in a Roman ; his courage in the field ; his care for his soldiers ; his gentleness to the foes whom severity had subdued ; his steadfast loyalty to the Emperor, repaid with such ungenerous suspicions ; his pure and temperate life ; his eloquent words ; his enthusiasm for the eloquent and beautiful words of other men ; his home, worthy of the ideal days of Rome ; the darkness around him, the bright hopes for the world which had centred in him ;—among all who recalled these things the sorrow was deep and true.

There were no processions at his funeral, no images of ancestors, no sons with veiled heads or daughters with uncovered faces and dishevelled hair. But the hopes of the whole Roman Empire were veiled at his death. The whole future grew black ; and little as it could lessen

her loneliness, Agrippina had a world to mourn with her.

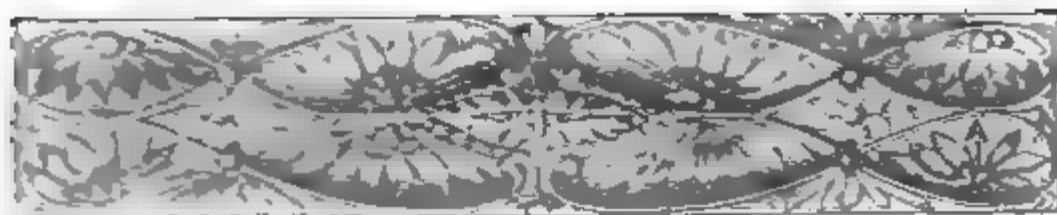
The German captives, slaves in the young Cæsar's household, had also cause to mourn the death of the noblest enemy Rome had sent them.

They would have mourned more if they had known that, by one of the strange melodramatic coincidences of history, on the very day on which Germanicus had died, his brave foe Herman, once hailed enthusiastically by his race as their Deliverer, had fallen by the swords of his own people.

The Deliverer and the Conqueror of the Germans died on the same day; the Roman Conqueror (it was believed) by the poison of Romans,—the German Liberator by the sword of Germans.

The world, Roman and German, had yet to find her true Conqueror and Deliverer.





CHAPTER XX.

IN a lowly dwelling in the quarter of Antioch where the numerous Jewish colony lived, as usual congregating as closely as possible, and having their synagogue for the centre of attraction, were gathered together, one evening late in October, the German captives Siguna and Siward, with little Hilda, old Laon, Callias the sculptor, and Onias and Esther, the master and mistress of the house.

The great sorrow (as usual) had brought other sorrows and separations in its train, and the little company who had grown so familiar with each other, had met for a last interview on the eve of a long parting.

Siguna alone was to return in the household of Agrippina to Rome.

Dreading more than separation or death for her daughter the pollution of one of the great Roman slave-households, the German mother had gladly consented to the purchase of the child by the childless Esther.

A strong affection had grown up between the two women. Siguna felt that to be a bond-maiden in the

charge of the Jewess would be a lot nobler than freedom in many a home. And the heart of Esther yearned towards the child who might be to her as her own,—in all but the great national Hope, which was centred in the mothers of her race, and in them alone.

Laon's contract was fulfilled, and he was free. In a short time he hoped, by the aid of Onias' skill in bargaining, and his opportunities for the sale of arms among his turbulent compatriots, to make capital sufficient to provide a refuge for his foster-child, Clœlia Diodora, if Fortune should enable him to rescue her. Siward was to use his strong arm for them, and Callias his skill in ornament and design.

Onias had paid the purchase-money for both Hilda and Siward, from mysterious sources, to which he gave no clue. In a few years it was hoped the brother would work out the ransom of both his sister and himself.

In the meantime the three were linked together by a common interest, and inspired each by his own individual hope

Laon sighed for his foster-child ; Siward for liberty for himself, his sister, and his country (not knowing yet how the hopes of the North German tribes had for the time been crushed by the assassination of Herman); and Callias was inspired by a long-cherished purpose, which he had only that evening confided to Siguna.

His heart was set on making, in some future year, little Hilda his bride. The sister of a brave brother,

and the daughter of a good mother, with a dower of sunshine in her fair face,—for such a bride he would be content to work and wait his seven years.

Siguna and Esther held grave debate on the matter. The heart of the German turned towards the race which, in the person of Laon, had so befriended her boy; and to Callias himself for his courteous bearing to them in their captivity: whilst to Esther the seven years' service had a patriarchal sanction. That evening, therefore, the mother's consent was obtained; and little Hilda, unconscious of her dignity, was promised to Callias as his future bride.

Siguna's heart was relieved for her children. For herself, she had determined her course. She would accompany Agrippina to Rome; there, as soon as might be, earn her freedom and return to her children at Antioch. This she had told them all. But only to Siward, in the last hour before her departure, did she confide the immovable purpose which lay deeper in her heart than anything. The first moment she was free she had determined to retrace her steps along the fatal Roman Road to the Lippe Valley, and there to find if Olave the Smith, her husband, still lived. All else in her future must depend on the issue of that search. She would trust no one but herself to make it, not even Siward. Others might grow too soon discouraged. In her heart only burned that unconquerable instinct which told her that he lived. And if he lived she would find him.

So the German captive family was again divided. Hilda remained in the household of Esther the Jewess, and Siward in the workshop of old Laon on the borders of the Orontes ; whilst Siguna went back over the seas to Rome with Agrippina and her children.

Back to Rome Agrippina and her mournful company went ; to Rome, where, not two years since, the princely form of the young Cæsar in his Conqueror's chariot among his boys had been the glory of the Triumph ; across the seas with their clusters of thickly-peopled isles, where a few months before every island and every city had sent forth their festive thousands in welcome.

On their way, by the Asiatic shore, they encountered the ships of Piso. There was apprehension of a battle. But the fleets passed each other with no further collision than bitter words shouted from crew to crew.

Little indeed could the dread of such hostilities have moved Agrippina. In her youth she had stood alone on the side of the Rhine nearest the enemy, to keep the bridge for her husband's legions. And now, although the love which had kindled the courage was with her no more, the fears of love had perished with it. Henceforth this world had little terrible to threaten her with, unless

it were through the children left to her vain and feeble guardianship.

Slowly she sailed across those peopled seas. A storm had gathered around them, and scattered the ships, when they had left the coast of Italy together. Now no storm hindered her. The powers of the under-world had accomplished their worst ; and no "envy of the gods" need lower now, with sullen menaces of tempest, around the widowed princess ; her course was too certainly towards shipwreck, returning to a court which hated her, with the ashes of her husband. Across calm seas, and under the pitiless smile of sunny skies, day after day she advanced to Rome.

We do not hear that she stopped at one of the places where so short a time ago she had been welcomed with Germanicus. No festive gatherings now at Athens ; no fond lingering at Actium over the places sacred to the memory of their common ancestors.

Only at Corcyra she rested a few days, to calm her spirit, "passionate in sorrow, unused to endure," to restore her enfeebled health, and gather strength to encounter the tide of sympathy and of recollections which awaited her on the Italian shores.

Tidings must have reached her there how deeply her sorrow was felt at Rome ; how, on a false report of the death of Germanicus, the courts of justice had been dissolved, and private houses shut up ; how again, on a delusive report of his having recovered, the doors of the

temples had been burst open by the throngs of rejoicing worshippers ; and afterwards, in December, the Festival of the Saturnalia had been no Festival, for the mourning throughout the city.

The friends of the family of the Cæsar did not wait for her disembarkation, but hastened to Brundisium, and crowded in ships around her.

She landed at Brundisium, bearing in her arms the Funeral Urn, the two children who were with her (one an infant in arms) at her side. Her other children met her on the shore.

Before she came in sight, it had been debated whether it would be best to receive her in silence, or with any voice of sorrow. But when she stepped on shore, bearing the sacred Urn, her eyes cast down, one groan burst from all ; the weeping of men could not be distinguished from that of the women ; only (it was said) the fresh grief of those who came to meet her was louder than that of those who had been with her, wearied and worn with long mourning.

The quays, the walls, the roofs of the houses were thronged with a silent multitude, grieving with her, "the only true child of Augustus, the only relic of ancient virtue left." Never, perhaps, was there a more passionate and genuine popular mourning. For those tears and lamentations were well known to find no favour with the Emperor, or the Emperor's aged mother. All formal honours had indeed been decreed by Tiberius. The

officers of two Prætorian cohorts met her at Brundisium; tribunes and centurions were appointed to bear the Urn on their shoulders; propitiatory sacrifices were offered on the altars of the Dii Manes. But it was observed that neither Tiberius nor Livia, nor (it was believed in consequence of the Emperor's prohibition) even Antonia, the mother of Germanicus, came forth to meet the dead, or to receive Agrippina. The people in every city were impelled by a generous impulse to compensate for the coldness of the Emperor. As they passed through town after town, the poor citizens in black, the knights in purple robes, came to meet them; precious raiment and perfumes were burned in honour of the beloved dead; whilst from the country districts and the more distant towns the people gathered in throngs.

So they reached the neighbourhood of Rome. Through the many miles of tombs bordering the Ap-pian Way, the procession passed.

Siguna thought of her own first approach to the city by the Flaminian Way, along the great road from the North. Then all around had been full of triumphal festivity; Germanicus and his family themselves the centre of all the life and joy. By the Campus Martius, by amphitheatres and temples, they had approached the Imperial City crowned by the Capitol, and along the Sacred Way had been drawn, to be themselves laid as another tribute at her feet.

Now trumpets, flutes, garlanded oxen, festive multi-

tude, all had vanished. And slowly the family of Germanicus passed on through the tombs, themselves the saddest spectacle of all, no more to lay the wreath of victory on the Capitol, but to lay the Urn with its few light ashes in the Mausoleum of the Cæsars by the Tiber.

Henceforth to Agrippina from a Triumphal Way, all the way through life had become a Way of Tombs; shadow after shadow would cross her path, yet scarcely darken it more.

From the City, the Senate and a great part of the Roman people came forth to meet her. Not in a stately, formal procession, but in broken groups—lamenting in low voices to each other, as men for whom in this death much was lost for ever—they entered together the City gates.

One heart remained little changed. One cold and bitter heart—which had been wrapped in envious gloom when all Rome was rejoicing with Germanicus the Conqueror—was chilled to a deeper darkness by the passionate lamentation over his death. Life has no fields so barren that Envy cannot gather her poisons there. If every shout of exultation in the Triumph of Germanicus had been like a sting to Tiberius, this silence and this passionate mourning pierced him with a deeper wound.

The day on which the sacred relics were borne to the mausoleum of Augustus was no day of even-voiced, melodious lamentation. At one time the crowded streets

were "a waste of desolate silences ;" at another, restless with bitter wailing. The Campus Martius (near which, on the banks of the Tiber, the mausoleum stood) was one blaze of light with funeral torches : armed troops, magistrates without their insignia, the people in their tribes, crying that the Commonwealth had fallen, and no hope was left : all hearts burning with love and sorrow for the pure, brave lives so few cared to follow ; for the lost Cæsar and the mourning Agrippina—calling on her as the "glory of the country, the only blood of Augustus," the only type of ancient ideal times left ; calling on the gods, with faces turned heavenward, "to preserve her offspring, that they might survive the wicked." A genuine burst of sorrow, regardless of prudence, braving the anger of the Emperor ; revealing for a moment to that fallen people the ideal they had lost ; revealing in them for a moment, as true sorrow does, the ideal for which they were created.

It was not Germanicus only the Roman people mourned that day. It was Rome—it was Roman honour and purity. It was more : it was a sorrow they had not learned to name ; the source of all darkness worth the name of darkness. It was a lost paradise, lost human happiness, a fallen human race, for which they wept. It was Sin. It was the lost ideal of humanity then (unknown to them) being lived into reality again at Nazareth. It was the lost Shepherd, the lost King and Saviour of men.

But on his icy height Tiberius kept still apart, unwarmed by the sunshine of common men, untouched by their storms of purifying sorrow. And soon from that summit fell from afar on the ears of mortals a hard voice, audible as a trumpet, and inhuman, with no uncertain sound—sarcastic, sententious, epigrammatic, full of unanswerable commonplaces and unmitigated common sense.

“Princes were mortal,” it said; “the State was eternal. It was not unseemly to lament in the first transport of sorrow; nay, tears were even a relief. But now it was time to compose their minds; as formerly the divine Julius losing his only daughter, and the divine Augustus deprived of his grandsons, had repressed their grief. Often before,” it sarcastically suggested, “the Roman people had borne calmly the death of generals. The April spectacles of the great goddess were at hand. Let them resume their amusements!”

A little later he might have pointed the lesson with his own example, when he replied to a letter of condolence from the Grecians for the death of his own son Drusus, by expressing to them in return his sympathy with them for the death of Hector of Troy.

Such was the heart to which Agrippina—proud, courageous, pure, truthful—had to look for protection for herself and her children. Such was the heart of him to whom the Roman world entreated to be suffered to erect temples, believing that all power was given to him in heaven and on earth.

This passionate mourning for Germanicus (in itself, by its implied comparison with himself, almost a revolt) was scarcely over when an entreaty came from this same Roman people to the Emperor which must have moved him to a cynical smile. The pauper citizens had murmured at the price of corn. Tiberius settled the price of it to the buyer by himself paying the extra price to the corn-dealer. Thereupon the Roman people spoke of his "care for the State" as "divine," invoked himself as "Lord," and once more supplicated permission to call him "Father of the Country."

Tiberius refused the titles, and sharply rebuked the suppliants. "Speech was difficult," it was said, "under a ruler who dreaded liberty, and hated flattery."

A strange horror mixed with pity almost fascinates the gaze, on this cold, calm man, incapable, it would seem, of joy or of sympathy; but not incapable, as it seemed afterwards, of anguish. Himself compelled to act the principal part in a world of shows, he hated all shows of grief or joy; and from his cold height, and with his passionless eyes, gazed through them, or brushed them away like cobwebs.

Exaggeration was in his eyes a crime, and he lived the centre of a world of the wildest exaggerations. He suffered the senators to talk poetically of "the priests of Mars singing the name of Germanicus among the names of the gods, with dance and striking of shields in the processional Salian hymn; of placing a curule chair for

him at the circus, surmounted with oaken crowns ; of carrying his ivory statue in the Circensian games." He suffered arches to be erected to his memory at Rome, on the Rhine, on Mount Amanus in Syria, a cenotaph at Antioch, a tribunal at Epidaphne. But when they would have decreed Germanicus a golden shield, of an extra size, as the meed of eloquence, the critical Emperor interfered. "Not larger," he said, "than the shields of others ; for eloquence was not measured by fortune."

Tiberius even disapproved of exaggeration in plundering the provinces. By his appointment the changes among the governors of Syria were less frequent than usual, on the principle, he said, "that one swarm of flies might be satiated with the blood of the victim, and it was an unnecessary cruelty to drive it away to be replaced by another."

Of the frightful crimes which are said to have ended his career, there were as yet few symptoms.

Strong, able, clear-sighted, far-sighted, rejecting sympathy, indignant with infirmity—the contrast between Tiberius and Him whose true universal empire was growing irresistibly under his rule, was, perhaps, even stronger then, than in those latter days of orgy and violence.

For the character of the Emperor stood bare in its essence, unconcealed, if unpolluted, by the rank death-growth of after years.

It was not to one untouched with the feeling of our infirmities, tearlessly diverting the mourner from the grave to the "games," in his own sorrow sarcastically rejecting sympathy, that all power was given.

But to One who, when he said, "Weep not," made death give back its prey; and who, with the sorrow He so soon turned into joy, "wept."

To One who, indeed, with insight clearer than that of Tiberius, knew what was in man; knew how the three would slumber, and one betray, and all forsake; yet sought their feeble sympathy, and hoped for them through all their fearfulness; and before the Father, in the calm intensity of His last prayer, said how He prized their faltering love.

To Him whose compassion was infinitely tender, because His sight was infinitely clear; because, through all the deadly intertwining of sin around the inmost heart, He saw that the deadly clasp could be unlocked, and unlocked by love alone; and loved on, and died for love, and by loving and dying has unlocked that mortal embrace of sin from hearts innumerable, age after age, and has redeemed and liberated them for ever and for ever.





CHAPTER XXI.

SIGUNA had been intrusted by the Jewess Esther with a packet and a message for her father in Rome. One evening she consulted Clœlia Diodora as to the best method of finding the old man, and they came to the conclusion that the venerable Jew who had spoken to Clœlia of old on the Cœlian Hill might be Esther's father.

"He used often on summer evenings to sit on a stone outside our garden," Diodora said. "I used to take him a cup of cold water from our well sometimes, and grapes from our vines; and he used to tell me lovely stories from the history of his people: of good women and their joys and sorrows; of women brave and heroic as the men, who delivered the land from tyrants; of a king who had been a shepherd, and was a poet always, by the sheepfold or on the throne, who sang songs to his harp. Strange songs they were, full of longing and love, and overwhelming sorrow breaking into rapturous joy. But all the love and longing and joy and sorrow were not for any earthly love, but for his God. And once the old

man told me of a great Hope of their nation, of a Deliverer whom he thought must be close at hand, who might indeed be in the world somewhere even now. I liked to listen. But then Laon told me these Jews have a dark misanthropic superstition, and I might be brought under the spell of it before I was aware. So, since Laon left, I have listened to the old man no more about his religion. Moreover, lately there have been dark rumours about the wicked rites of certain Egyptians, who they say are like these Jews. But now and then I have still brought the old man water, or figs and grapes, and sometimes let him talk to me about his family, as he sat outside the garden on the slopes of the Coelian. He has a daughter in Syria; and he has spoken to me of two little grandsons who rest, he says, in the Jewish Catacombs beyond the Tiber. It must be the same of whom your Jewess Esther spoke. This evening, we will creep through the garden door and see if he is there."

That evening the German mother and the Roman girl, looking out through the garden door, saw a feeble, bent, white-haired old man standing outside. His arms were outstretched, his face was turned to the south-east, towards the Alban hills, where the sunset was reflected from the height of the old Latin shrine.

But his gaze was not resting on any Italian hills or any pagan shrines. Beyond, beyond them all, to the sanctuary of his race; to the hills which stand round about Jerusalem; to the city where David dwelt, the

shrine towards which Daniel prayed, the home of his youth ; the centre of the great promises which irradiated the future for him, for Israel, for the nations.

Beyond, beyond Jerusalem, her hills and her Temple, to Him "from whom cometh help ;" to Him whom "heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain."

Cloelia paused reverently when she saw him, and withdrew into the shadow of the gateway.

"Those old hymns of his people are in his heart and on his face !" she said. "See how it glows with love, and longing, and hope, and joy. Have you ever seen anything like this, Siguna ? Some one that old man *loves* is in heaven, and he is speaking to him !"

"Once I saw something like it," Siguna answered, "in Esther. She is his daughter. I am sure of it now. That look in his face has brought out a likeness I might not otherwise have seen. Once, by the Sea of Galilee, I saw her look just so. There had been a festival in their synagogue that morning, she told me afterwards ; and a present given of a fair covering for their Sacred Book, on the first birth-day of the son of a rich Galilean.

"I found her standing thus at sunset by a little lonely village proseucha, a Jewish place of prayer. The waves were rippling on the shingle, and all the sky was glowing behind the western hills. She was looking heavenward, and the tears were streaming over her face. But she was speaking to some one she knew well ; as he

is now. And on her face were the same awe, and love, and longing. Scarcely, I think, the same joy. Afterwards, when she saw me, she said, 'They will not return to me, but I shall go to them ;' and then looking up again : 'There is forgiveness, forgiveness with Thee !' *Forgiveness !* I have always remembered, because of her face ; and because the word was so strange to me. Vengeance, justice we hear of from the gods. Perhaps of penalties remitted. But 'forgiveness' seemed something altogether new. Forgiveness such as this. The penalty had been inflicted to the utmost on her. Her children were gone from her for ever. She had nothing to ask ; she had nothing to lose. Yet she spoke of forgiveness as of something which filled her with unutterable longing. I wondered long, until one day I asked her, 'What is this forgiveness, this joy for which you long ?'

" 'Do you not know ?' she said. 'Had you never a mother that you grieved ? never a friend or a child who grieved you ? The joy of forgiveness ? It is being forgiven. It is being welcomed back to the heart we have grieved. When David the king cried on God for mercy, the child was dead. He did not pray for the blow to be averted. It had fallen. He prayed for the *sin* to be forgiven. He prayed for the old loving-kindness to be felt in his heart once more.'

"That was another new word to me," Siguna added. "*Sin*. Not crime and vengeance. But sin and for-

givenness. It was new and strange. She talked to me often, and sometimes I think I understand a little. But I understand best when I think of the look that evening on her face, as now on his."

In a few minutes the old man took his staff and sank down on the seat, and then they saw how feeble and tottering the thin frame was.

Gently they drew near to him.

"I think it is for thee I have a message," Siguna said ; "from Esther the Jewess."

The old man's dark eyes brightened and his brow flushed as he scanned the kind, honest face.

"My child !" he murmured.

"She is at Antioch, with Onias her husband," Siguna answered ; "and she bade me say there is a welcome for thee under their roof ; and to pray thee from her and Onias to come."

The old man clasped his hands.

"Is Onias then rich again ?" he said ; "and has he forgiven me ? I made a foolish contract once," he added humbly, "and lost much money for him as well as for myself and Esther. I did foolishly. And I thought he would never have forgiven."

"Esther the Jewess bade me say Onias desires thy presence under his roof. Things have not gone altogether well with him. He was robbed once near Jericho. And looking round for cause why he should be thus punished, he remembered thee, and some

ancient commandment about parents, with a promise, and thought perhaps it might bring down a blessing on his roof if he took thee home and suffered thy daughter to cherish thy old age. This from Onias. And she bade me add, that the deepest desire of her heart is to see thee and to have thy blessing again before she dies."

"His ways are above our ways," said the old man, rising reverently. "I am driven from Rome. Four thousand of us forced into the Roman service, and exiled to Sardinia to root out the robbers on the mountains there, and (the Romans hope) to perish in the strife or by the cruel climate. These are our young and strong. The rest—we, the aged and infirm—are all banished instantly from Rome. And now once more my daughter's home is open to me!"

"Lady," he added, turning to Clœlia, "I came to-night to thank thee for thy kindness to an outcast old man, and to pray thee not to believe the evil they speak of me and of my people. We are driven from the city because of the iniquities of certain Egyptian idolaters. We Jews confounded with the Egyptians, who hate us! we servants of our God condemned with these worshippers of abominations! No court to plead in, no judge to appeal to! We deserve it perhaps for other sins. But thou, I pray, confound us not with those who hate us and blaspheme our God. It is hard to be execrated for worshipping Him only. But to be

cast out with those who hate Him, this is bitter indeed. Believe it not."

"I believe nothing evil of thee," Clœlia said. And Siguna added,—

"Come hither once again to-morrow, that I may bring thee the money thy daughter sent to help thee on the way."

But on the next evening no old man was to be found on the stone seat, nor anywhere on the hill-side. Nor on the next, nor even on the next again.

The following day was the day for the execution of the decree of exile. By the evening of that day not a Jew nor a Jewess was to be left in Rome.

Siguna resolved to lose no more time. That very evening she searched among the Jewish dwellings in the valley of Egeria; but it was not until the next day that, at last, in a poor shed in the Jewish quarter beyond the Tiber, she found the old man, lying, forsaken and helpless, on an old embroidered rug of Syrian workmanship. Beside him were bread and a cruse of water, and some of the grapes Clœlia Diodora had given him on the last evening they had seen him.

It was plain that the decree of exile would never be enforced on him.

"I shall not see Antioch!" he said to Siguna, whose quiet motherly demeanour made it seem quite natural she should be beside his sick-bed. Kneeling on the ground beside him, she folded her veil into a pillow for

him, choosing the freshest grapes to place within his parched lips.

"Now you are come," he murmured, "I shall die content. You will take my child a message. Tell her I blessed her always, every day, a hundred times a day; and now at last more than ever. Tell her God will bless her, is blessing her always, though not in ways we choose."

Siguna obtained permission to stay with the dying man. That night there were wailings and bitter partings and an eager stir of preparation in the streets, and the ceaseless passing of men and women laden with all they could carry of their household furniture. The next evening there was dead silence all around. Empty houses and empty streets; and the German captive left alone with the Jewish exile, following him as far as she might on that bitter path of everlasting exile from all familiar things and dear faces which was all she knew certainly of death.

Occasionally the old Jew's heart was lighted up by a hope she knew not. He spoke of a Resurrection at a Last Day. But it did not seem to be from this that the real light came which sometimes kindled his failing eyes. Between him and that Last Day lay a long unknown sleep. Between this Egypt and that Promised Land lay a tract of unexplored wilderness no one who had traversed it had ever returned to speak of. What dreams might be in that sleep, what dragons,

and deeps, and mountains burning with fire, and bitter Marahs, and waste trackless solitudes, he knew not.

Only he knew that God was there—here, there, everywhere. “Even there shall Thy hand be ;” not to crush but to “uphold,” not to drive but to “lead.”

Sometimes indeed his faith grew dim ; and then a shadow rested on him, darker, it seemed to Siguna, than any she had seen on dying faces before.

He spoke of sin, of transgression, with a horror which communicated itself to her. She remembered what she had heard of the crimes of the banished Egyptians, and at times felt as if she must be in the presence of some fearful criminal ; until at length she gathered courage to ask him gently if he had any great crime on his conscience, and if anything could be done to expiate it, or to remedy the consequences. Had he wronged any one ? Could she at least say he had confessed and asked forgiveness, that at least he might rest in the grave ? ”

The old man shook his head.

“Not wrong, nor crime !” he said. “*Sin !* Against Him I have sinned, and before Him I shall stand ! Thou requirest truth within, *within*. And within me is sin.”

It was the word Esther had used, the terror she had felt by the Sea of Galilee, strange to the German matron. She could only think of some wrong done to men, or

some transgression of ritual which might have offended the gods.

"Can I tell thy child to have expiations, libations, sacrifices made for thee?" she said.

He shook his head.

"I know Esther would do anything for me," he said with moistened eyes. "But no, there is only One. Wash me, purge me, and I shall be whiter than snow. There is forgiveness with Thee—forgiveness."

"Forgiveness!" Again Esther's word, and again on the face of the dying man something of the awe and light on hers.

Then again dim, mournful, dying words from the histories of his ancient people came back on him, as his spirit shivered in that same awful shadow within which they had first been uttered.

"Shall the dead praise Thee," he murmured, "or they that go down to the pit? I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more. The grave cannot praise Thee. Death cannot celebrate Thee. They that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. Cannot hope for Thy truth!" he murmured. "Will even *that* be lost there? Shall my people be saved, and I not see it? shall the Redeemer come to Zion, and I not know it? 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come!' So near, so near, O my God, to the brightness of Thy coming. And yet must the shadow come first, and no light ever pierce it for me!"

Then he would add,—

“Perchance *she* will see it—my Esther, my child!”

And then,—

“If it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not tarry. A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday. Couldst Thou not have spared me one of Thy moments, to see the morning break?—the morning without clouds! I had thought He would not let me die until it broke.”

Then turning once more to the great Hope of his people,—

“This is our God—we have waited for Him. And He will save us. Yet, yet shall this song be sung in Zion.”

And with the hope which led him from self to God, once more the light broke in on his own heart,—

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right, with me, even with me?”

And again,—

“I will love Thee, O Lord my strength. I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.”

Patiently the German captive watched beside him, wondering at this conflict and communion with One unseen, yet so trusted and loved.

Death was evidently dying to him. No Divine Word from human lips had yet dissolved its terror.

The future was evidently dim to him. But an extinguishable light burned on through all the darkness.

God trusted, feared, known, loved, was with this departing one. Not so much a hope of immediate immortality sustained him, nor visions of a bright world beyond this; but one eternal, glorious, sustaining Presence, shining through all worlds, shining through all barriers between,—and, when he could look at it, not so much promising immortality as obliterating death with the deathless light of the Divine countenance.

He made her promise to have his body laid among his people in the Jewish Catacomb. He showed her the little bundle of spices his people had left beside him to embalm him, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

And, mingled with strange words in a foreign tongue, which sounded to her like deep murmurs of some subterranean river, she heard him say among his last audible speeches,—

“I will lay me down in peace, and sleep.”

And again,—

“Oh, had I the wings of a dove! Then would I flee away, and be at rest.” “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness. Satisfied.”

And last of all,—

“Lay me down and sleep, in peace,—in peace.”

When, in faithful fulfilment of his last request, she went to see him laid in the Jewish Catacomb,—among the symbols on the tombs there she saw many times on the walls the picture of a dove about to take flight, with an

olive branch in its mouth. And among the inscriptions she saw again and again,—“Peace.” “In peace.”

She came away, pondering many things in her heart; thinking of the old man's weary spirit, and wondering whether it had indeed found the wings it longed for, and was at rest.

Often she and Clœlia Diodora spoke together of those things, and wondered what they meant.

And often the deformed girl longed to speak of them to her sister the Vestal; but she thought of Laon, and did not dare.



CHAPTER XXII.

SLOWLY the coils twined closer and closer around Agrippina and her children, slowly, but never relaxing.

It does not seem to have been so much a deliberate purpose of destroying her, on the part of Tiberius, as a sleepless, passionate fear which possessed him ; a weak will in the place of power perpetually chafing against a strong will in the place of dependence. The repulsion of a suspicious, timid, subservient nature, with an instinctive preference for subterranean and crooked ways, from a nature courageous, frank, straightforward, and little able to stoop.

It was no strong paternal affection for his son Drusus which made him thus jealous of the representatives of Germanicus. He chose at last Caligula, one of Agrippina's children, as his successor, in preference to his own grandson.

Nor were this distrust and jealousy only fed by the intrigues of rivals. However diligently fanned by his minister Sejanus, and by others who had a strong per-

sonal interest in Agrippina's ruin, the flame burned on when Sejanus and those who had nourished it were gone.

It was harder for Agrippina to fulfil the dying commands of Germanicus than for his friends. On them he had enjoined vengeance ; on her submission. They had well-nigh the whole Roman people on their side in calling for vengeance on his murderers. But for Agrippina to lay aside her proud, unyielding character, was not so easy, when the affection to which her pride had delighted to bend, and the serene, even temper, the kindly, genial character which had softened hers, were taken from her.

Nor was it easy for her to live in dependence on the Empress-mother, who had many a womanish grudge against her from of old, and who persisted in shielding Plancina, the proud wife of Piso, from the sentence of the law and the vengeance of the people, under her own personal friendship.

Yet Agrippina lived to prove that even the guardianship of the Empress Livia, cold and comfortless as it was, had sheltered her from that fiercer passion of jealousy and fear which burned against her in the Emperor's heart.

Few things are more tragical than the history of the fourteen years of Agrippina's widowhood.

To be her friend was to be a mark for the Emperor's ravens—the informers who lived on the destruction of their victims ; a mark, as it must have seemed, for Fate itself.

Drusus, the son of Tiberius, had shown a kindly interest in her. He was murdered, through the perfidy of his wife, the sister of Germanicus.

Silius had rendered signal service to the State by quelling a wide-spread and perilous revolt in Gaul. But his wife was Agrippina's friend. The informers attacked him ; he was condemned, and perished.

The highest station, even imperial blood, could not protect those who were known to be attached to her.

Yet, surrounded as she was by malignity, treachery, and vice, it is a strange testimony to the power of conscience in enforcing homage to virtuous life, that calumny never dared assail her purity.

Once we hear that, ever vehement, and then in a flame on account of the peril of her kinswoman Claudia Pulchra, she rushed unbidden into the Emperor's presence when he happened to be sacrificing to the deified Augustus.

"Vain it is," she said, "to offer victims to the divine Augustus, and to ill-treat his children. Not into those dumb effigies is the divine spirit transfused. See before you his true image, sprung from his celestial blood, living to understand and to suffer, a suppliant low at your feet." For her sake, she said, Pulchra was attacked ; for loving her almost to adoration, forgetful of what others had suffered for the same crime.

The sudden outburst for once startled the bitter dread and jealousy of the cautious Emperor from its hiding-place into voice and daylight.

"It was no wrong to her," he said, quoting a Greek verse, "that she did not reign!"

And from that time, it is said, he never risked another conversation with her.

So she lived on through weary year after year, under the roof of a man who seems to have looked on her as a kind of embodiment of the hatred of the Roman people for himself.

The traitors who imbittered the Emperor's suspicions against her, at the same time instilled into her open and unsuspecting nature dark fears of him.

Not in Antioch or Epidaphne only, it was suggested, could the Emperor find poisoners and poisons to deliver him from too popular guests and kinsfolk.

The last glimpse we have of her in the presence of Tiberius, is sitting at his table speechless and motionless, refusing to touch any of the viands there; until at length the Emperor himself presented some apples to her with his own hand, when (acting, according to her wont, on the impulse of the moment) she handed the fruit untasted to her servants.

The large keen eyes of the Emperor coolly observed the action, so significant to all present. He made no open comment, but turning to the Empress-mother, who reclined at the table near him, he said, "It could be no wonder if he dealt more severely with one who pretended to believe him a poisoner."

Whereupon throughout the city the rumour spread

that "her departure from the world was fixed ; it would not be dared publicly, but some secret method would be found."

It seems, nevertheless, as if she honestly tried to fulfil the command of her husband.

She made no melodramatic display of her wrongs ; all the ingenious endeavours of pretended friends to induce her to make a public appeal to the people, to embrace the statue of her forefather, the deified Augustus, before the multitudes in the Forum, and so claim the protection of the Senate and people, failed. Perhaps, with her true and intense character, she knew too well what a shadow the Roman Senate and people had become.

Nor would she fly, as she was falsely counselled, to the armies in Germany, the scene of her heroic actions in her happy days, and cast herself and her children on the generosity of the army her husband had commanded. Probably she had also learned how a few years, in the ceaseless flowing away of life, suffice to change a body of men bearing the same name ; how "we step into the same rivers, and do not step into them." The veterans who had pressed the hands of her husband on their toothless gums, and opened the scars of unjust wounds to his eyes, to show how long and hard had been their service, had passed beyond earthly reward or disgrace. The legions whom she had rescued on that further bank of the Rhine, standing on the post of danger by the bridge she had saved, to welcome them, were no longer there except in name. The

men who had composed them, who had gloried in her husband's courage and majestic bearing, whose wounds she had cared for, to whom with her own hands she had given food and clothing, were scattered throughout the empire, in Egypt, Syria, Gaul, or Mauritania.

There was no refuge for her on earth.

The god of the Roman earth, in whose august presence she lived, who had at length permitted a temple to be erected to him at Smyrna (reluctantly according this grace to Smyrna in preference to twelve Asiatic cities who supplicated for the honour), was no "unknown god" to her.

Living under the shadow of his angry and averted countenance so many solitary years, she found that his departure to Capreæ brought no lessening of the shadow to her.

Seven years after the death of Germanicus (A.D. 25), Tiberius left his palace on the Palatine, and Rome itself, never to enter it again.

Three years after this the Empress-mother died. With her fell the last shelter of Agrippina and her children. The habitual deference to his mother's wishes buried with her, the Emperor was left without one human relationship to restrain him, as he had long been without one human affection to ennoble him.

In a brief time after the Empress' funeral, which her son did not attend, the servile Senate was thrown into perplexity by a letter from the Emperor, accusing Agrip-

pina and her favourite son Nero as persons dangerous to the State.

Still "a haughty countenance and an unconquerable spirit" were all the accusations he dared bring against the widowed princess. Worse than this, while she lived, he never dared say of her.

Once more the people, moved with a generous impulse, besieged the Senate with appeals for the wife and children of the young prince they had loved and mourned. They bore the images of Agrippina and her son to the Senate. "The letters from Tiberius were forged!" they cried. "The prince would never thus plot the ruin of his house!"

But from the twelve villas on the island of Capræ came a repetition of the accusations, and a rebuke to the people and the Senate.

Such a voice from amidst the thunders, neither people nor Senate dared resist.

The young princes were imprisoned, and the mother was banished to the island of Pandataria, the convict settlement of the empire for dangerous and illustrious criminals.

This was in the year of our Lord 30.

The slow years were wearing on. Eleven had separated Agrippina from Germanicus. Three more, and the "haughty countenance and unconquerable spirit" would affront the Emperor no more.

Wearily meanwhile had these years passed for Siguna

the German captive, seeing around her so much wrong that she could not redress, so much sorrow that she could not comfort, with the great longing of her heart—to return to her country and search for Olave—unfulfilled.

Vainly had she sought tidings from band after band of Northern captives brought to Rome after the suppression by Silius of the revolt in Gaul. Her very fidelity had delayed her liberation, by making her services indispensable. Still that purpose was before her, to be accomplished with the first breath of freedom.

In her appearance those ten years had wrought little change. The golden threads of the hair had turned to silver. The wistful sadness had deepened in the soft blue eyes, and tears had dimmed them. But she was still the same fair, tall, erect, matronly woman, with the welcoming motherly look in her eyes which drew the little children to her, as if they felt near her the soft brooding of infolding wings.

On Clœlia Diodora also years had made little outward alteration.

The old anxious look, which had been so painful on the childish face, no longer seemed so unnatural. The depth of the large thoughtful eyes had lost something of its weird, bewildered, preternatural wonder, as of an exiled spirit, never to be naturalized on earth; partly because the anxiety had been turned into a natural channel through her love and solicitude for her sister.

For on Clœlia Pulchra these years had wrought a

marked and mournful change. She had passed from the second decade of her Vestal life to the third, from the years of more active service to those of instruction. The aged "Occia, who had for seven-and-fifty years presided over the Vestals with the greatest sanctity," had passed from among them. Those who had welcomed Clœlia Pulchra as a little child, and called her "Fair," and cherished and taught her, were fast gliding into decline. She had come prematurely to the prosaic levels of middle-age—into the disenchantment of its colourless daylight, while still a long possible tract of weary years lay before her. At seven-and-twenty Clœlia the Vestal felt as if a whole life lay behind her, and before her another life as long, with no change to break and no interests to fill it.

Patiently she still went about her daily ministries in the temple. But the roof of the world had become lower and narrower to her year by year. The Rome where Tiberius reigned, and the Senate and people which could rise with womanish shrieks of entreaty for Agrippina's rescue, and yet let her perish, and abjectly supplicate her oppressor to be permitted to worship him, the people one of whose chief reproaches against the Emperor was that he was too "morose" to delight sufficiently in the slaughter and torture of the gladiatorial games, was scarcely a satisfactory Patria for which to sacrifice youth and beauty and life.

Was it for this the waters had been kept fresh and

pure beneath the rock-arches of the Alban hills?—to be poured on such a barren waste of irremediable corruption as this?

And, more terrible still, with the continued disenchantment of earth came deeper doubts as to heaven.

What was to assure her that those stars she had once fondly thought of as dim hearth-fires, heavenly Vestal shrines, were not fed by hands as weary, for ends as vain, as this altar she tended on earth? What was to assure her that they were hearth-fires at all; that there was any focus, any living hearth, any loving heart at the core of the world; that the universe was not as Rome, governed by a Power which scorned love, and cared not for homage, and knew not pity—a clear, passionless brain, which subdued mutinies, and saw through all shows, itself included, and doled out daily doles of corn to a pauper world, and was moved by nothing, unless by envy of anything too high, and fear of anything too strong? If, indeed, these darker tales of foul deeds, on Olympus and on Capreæ, were the inventions of a depraved age!

What was to assure her that even a brain, even clear, passionless intelligence, was at the core of the world, and not merely clear, impassive Fire, mighty to warm and to quicken, or to scorch and consume, entirely indifferent and unconscious which it accomplished? As the fire she tended was unconscious whether it cooked a beggar's onions, or glowed on the sacred shrine of Vesta, or burned

down, as it had lately done, a hundred houses on the Cœlian Hill.

Thus the hopeful, upward look passed from Clœlia Pulchra's eyes, and the calm, joyous light from her brow, and the buoyancy from her step.

The faultless beauty of her features remained, and the dignity of her bearing, but there was nothing to indicate the enthusiasm of her early days, when patriotism had been to her a passion, and religion a fervent flaming up of her whole being. Illusions had vanished ; and no sweet glow of human affection, no high realities of divine love, replaced them. The glow, the warmth were gone ; and, in consequence, the purity seemed the mere inevitable whiteness and changelessness of a marble statue.

Except to Clœlia Diodora, her sister. With her the old life of tender protecting affection flowed on, so that the deformed girl still saw in her the beautiful fervent being who had been the adoration of her childhood, only dearer by her deepened pity for the sorrows of the world, and by the deepening shadow of the years which the poor girl felt too plainly were bearing them on to separation and death.

The old home of her house had been destroyed in the great fire which laid the Cœlian waste. Her parents had died, and the orphan girl now lived in a room near the temple, on a pension given to her, among other noble maidens, by the bounty of the Empress-mother.

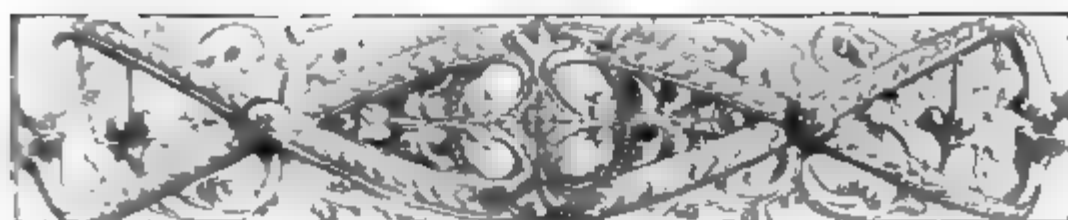
From time to time tidings and fatherly messages had

come from Laon, with gifts. But he knew the sisters would never endure to be separated, and as yet his workshop had not so prospered as to permit his returning to live at Rome, near his foster-child.

With Siguna the sisters kept up an affectionate intercourse.

And it was a further narrowing and chilling of their small world of affection, when at last the breaking up of the persecuted Princess Agrippina's household set the German captive free to go on that quest in the far North which seemed to the Roman sisters wild and adventurous and shadowy as the descent of the pious Æneas among the unsubstantial shades of the under-world.





CHAPTER XXIII.

AT Antioch, with Siward and Hilda, these ten years had been years not of fading but of unfolding: with Siward from youth to manhood, from visions into steady work of preparation; with Hilda from the child's dream of the world within the folded blossom, to the flower opening in a world of sunshine.

At first, when the tidings of the death of Herman reached Siward, it was to him as if the whole world had shrunk and shrivelled together, so hopeless seemed the liberation without the Liberator,—the freedom of a people who had assassinated him who would have set them free.

Unconsciously to himself, the Law and Order of the Roman world had become part of his being, and he felt freedom without obedience to be as impossible as a building without architectural lines,—that is, all freedom worth the name; living freedom, freedom for men, freedom for a nation, freedom to build and grow; any freedom but a wild beast's freedom, to roam where it liked,

and destroy what it pleased ; any freedom but that of death, free to dissolve into its component atoms.

By degrees, however, other purposes for his people sprang up again, and gave interest to his life. He thought the time might come when he himself might go back and give to his race something of what old Laon and the Romans had given to him. Although he could not have expressed it, he felt that in every way the Romans must be conquered by their own weapons ; not by spears and swords only, tempered as Roman smiths could temper them, but by Roman law, and endurance, and knowledge, and union.

Meantime he was working out freedom for himself and for Hilda. For Hilda first. He would not have his sister married until she was a freewoman ; nor would he have her owe her freedom to her betrothed. And Onias was not altogether an easy proprietor to purchase from. Again and again his price for freedom rose as it drew near, by his finding some entangled interpretations of the original agreement ; until the patience of Callias was exhausted, and he and Laon together insisted on a definite contract being made.

Meantime, under the fretting of these petty injustices, the attraction which Siward had at first felt to the religion of the Hebrews lost all its power. It sank in his mind to a level with the other religions of the world.

Afar off, on an Olympus, an Asgard, or a Sinai, among lightnings and thunders, very powerful in the past,

powerful now also, but apparently not discriminating, he saw a shadowy supreme authority ; whether residing in a Sovereign or in a Council, perhaps mattered little ; since long ago the executive had devolved on minor divinities, close at hand, tangible and efficient. This supreme authority towered in isolated pomp, to be done homage to on certain court days, whether one in seven, or one in three hundred and sixty-five, did not seem to Siward material ; the real worship being rendered sedulously, the real prayer and service offered morning, noon, and night, to the power which could procure the good desired, whether Tiberius Cæsar or the Mint-goddess, under her countless forms.

The religion of Esther, on the other hand, seemed to him like the religion of his mother, of Clœlia the Vestal, and of other good women. Pure flames of aspiration ascending from pure hearts, through pure ether—whither, ah, whither ! who could tell !

Underneath all the open-air worship, the fair temples, and the sunny heights, moreover, he traced everywhere that ancient worship of the Eumenides ; the dark cavern of conscience and the sanctuary of avenging justice.

With the Jewish religion, the great Jewish Hope of a Deliverer, which at first had seemed to Siward so glorious, also ceased to interest him. What could patriotism be to such as Onias, but selfishness expanded ? What could such a hope be, but this selfish patriotism projected into the future ? What could a Jewish anointed King

be, but a King of Jews, an universal Emperor enthroned beside a city Jerusalem, and crushing all other nations under Jewish feet, as the deified Augustus crushed all the world under the feet of victorious Romans!

The legend, with its golden future, was beautiful, no doubt, transfigured through the hearts of women like Esther, and shed a lovely morning light over them, more inspiring perhaps, though not more beautiful and tender, than the lingering sunset tints of an ideal Patria in the past which glowed around Clœlia Pulchra.

On little Hilda, meantime, bond-service weighed lightly,—mere ballast to make her course surer and her poise steadier.

In Esther's presence there was a stillness and a peace in which the earnest yet joyous nature of the German maiden grew symmetrical and strong.

Pride had little place in Esther's heart, and therefore sorrow found only her softer work to do there. Her presence warmed and lighted a little sphere of purity and peace around her, and in the heart of it the little German maiden grew up, in the seclusion of that Oriental home, with as little contact with the brilliant, corrupt world of Antioch around her, as if Antioch had been the wild pastoral hill-country, and she a patriarchal maiden keeping her father's sheep by sweet, fresh springs, among the green pastures of tender grass and the waters of rest.

The sadness of Esther's own life fell but as a sacred,

calming quiet around the child ; whilst the seclusion of the Jewish home was kept from being a narrowing isolation for Hilda by three inlets and outlets between her little world and the great world beyond.

One was a gateway into the Past—into green forest-paths, gladdened and hallowed by the voice of her mother. Another into the Future, a threshold which she was soon to cross : and through this came shining glimpses of sweet hope, and visions of beauty from Callias's Greek world of art. The third was the upward opening : like that in the heart of every Roman house—unroofed, open to the sky, through which the dews and rains showered into the impluvium, and the flames went up from the hearth-altar, and the soul went up to the stars which crossed it solemnly at night,—went up through that night which Esther had taught her was no darkness to One above ; and beyond the night—through the stars which were as the golden sands of His heavenly shores, yet each of which He called by name—to Him whose name was not the Thunderer, or the Sun-god, or only the Almighty or the Beautiful, but “the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”

Little Hilda was drinking into her inmost spirit that glorious name of God, for the preservation of which the Jewish nation existed ; a vine, a life-tree in the world,

until that name should be manifested in One born of Jewish race, the True Vine and Life-Tree for all the world—until the mystic bud which infolded the hidden treasure should expand into the Fruit for the healing of the nations, the Bread of Life for mankind.

In vain old Laon warned Callias against the peril of suffering his bride to be “fettered in the iron bondage of the Jewish superstition.” To Callias it was, as received by Esther and Hilda, only one of the countless forms of the Beautiful.

“They have lovely legends of good women,” he said, “these Jews ; and magnificent traditions of heroic women, as fine as any of old Rome — chieftainesses, princesses, Amazons who have rescued their nation ; grand, fearless heroines, with eyes like lightning and brows like Hermon. But Esther and little Hilda are not of that type. There is a story of two women who loved each other, just as Esther and Hilda do—a sorrowful Naomi, and a young, fair Ruth, strong and patient as any of the Amazons, but all her strength the strength of faithful affection and tender piety. A Gentile, too, she was, this sweet Ruth, like Hilda ; yet enshrined in the heart of their old national books. Then there is a Hannah, a tender mother ; and a Queen Esther, saving her people by her beauty, her loyalty, and her prayers. Beautiful, chaste old legends !—I wish nothing better for my Hilda than to grow up steeped in their fresh air and pure, soft light.”

"Boy ! boy ! dreamer !" Laon would reply ; " you talk as if everything were a dream to every one. I tell thee, these soft Jewish women have a religion against which you may break your will and break their hearts, but you will never uproot it. Wife, children, husband,—they will sacrifice all for this superstition of their God and of their people."

"But Hilda is not of their race," Callias replied. "She takes all the beauty, and leaves out the severity. To her this faith is no rigid armour. It is a lovely vesture of fine linen, white and glistening. The Jews may be bigots, and eaten up with national pride ; but their proselytes take their good doctrine, and happily can have no share in the national pride. If it were not for their uncivilized objection to human statues," he added, perversely, "I should have a great inclination to claim instruction and be a proselyte myself."

So Hilda continued to attend the synagogue with Esther. She learned to watch until the three stars which marked the Sabbath detached themselves from the fading daylight, and the sacred day of rest had begun, and to welcome them with delight, like lamps lighted for a festival. The mere sound of many voices in the synagogue, the mere presence of numbers, made a holiday in her secluded life. Then there was the reading of sacred words—which Esther explained to her—and the chanting of the ancient liturgy ; and then the long leisure in the quiet house or under the shadow of figs and trellised

vines in the court, which left room for so much sweet talk with Esther, and so many happy visions of her own ; she, as a Gentile, being moreover permitted a freer use of her busy, serviceable hands than was considered lawful for a Jewess, in the various loving ministries to the many "hungry," to whom Esther made the Sabbath a delight, by dealing out bread and raiment, and gathering them to her home.

To this bounty Onias did not object. Giving alms was a part of his religion. On this point the letter of the law was plain, and the meaning of the law and the prophets legible ; as plain and as legible as the rules and threats concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. There were threats, and there were, as he had proved, robbers capable of being mysteriously commissioned to execute these threats, between Jerusalem and Jericho. Moreover, there were promises. The Hand which made Abraham "very rich" in servants and in cattle, could in these latter days make Abraham's faithful children rich in Roman coin.

To set a portion of property rigidly apart for the Unnameable was as much a part of the contract between Him and Israel, as to set apart a portion of time. The quantity of both which He demanded was quite definitely fixed ; and it was dangerous to trifle with those celestial accounts. The tithe of mint and anise, and the seventh of the measured minutes of life, must by no means fail. It was probable that the tenth would be made up in

good Gentile coin, and the seventh in length of days : it was possible even that it might be paid in good measure, one of the contracting parties being, in some sublime and religious sense, possessor of heaven and earth. " Job had twice as much " given back ; Hezekiah's days were stretched out fifteen years.

Therefore Onias, with that " true self-interest " and far-seeing prudence which are the changeless principles of Pharisaical religion, encouraged Esther in her benefactions to the members of the synagogue ; being only perplexed as to the amount, by the conflict between the pleasures of popularity and the perils of being thought rich.

The day of Hilda's marriage came. Along the streets and through the gardens of Antioch the young bride was led to her new home with the lamps of the virgins, the bridal songs, and all the festive procession which have become to us familiar and sacred parables from childhood.

Onias stroked his beard at the close of the day in a comfortable little glow of benevolent complacency. He had suffered Esther to bestow suitable raiment on the portionless maiden, and had even with some little reluctance seen certain gold and silver coins transferred from Esther's own dark tresses to the fair hair of the German bride. Moreover, was not his taking a ransom at all an act of grace ? There was no command that he knew in

Leviticus about a jubilee, or a sabbatical year of liberation for Gentile slaves ; or, at all events, no stipulation as to price. And Hilda's services were becoming more valuable every year.

He felt he had really gone *beyond* the letter of the law, and done an action worthy of being recorded by the prophets. In this sense of virtue his heart felt altogether so expansive, that he said in the evening to Siward,—

“One day, my son, I shall perhaps be able to grant you also your emancipation.”

“Fix the price now, then !” said Siward, abruptly and concisely.

“Now, my son !—now ! Scarcely a day this for bargains ; we have given it to festivity. I have the kindest feelings towards you and your sister. Did you see the golden bracelet on her wrist ? I gave it myself to Esther long ago. This is a day for gifts, not for business.”

Siward's spirit rose. He had purchased his sister's freedom at the hard price of years of his own ; literally with a large piece of his own life. To her, by patient, generous toil, he had opened home, love, and liberty. Before him lay years of bondage, petty injustice, with all the terrible possibilities which were included in the slavery of those days—the yoke, the scourge, the cross. He could not brook that what he had purchased literally by giving himself, should be spoken of as a gift from another.

"I do not ask you to give me alms. I ask you to do justly," he said. "Call in fair judges, fix the price of my freedom, and take back your wedding gifts without counting them as part of it."

But to the Pharisee to give alms was far easier than to do justly. Alms were a definite quantity which could be set apart out of the interest of money and the profits of business, and leave the whole untouched. Justice was a large word—a text capable of many perplexing interpretations. In the highest sense it might involve sacrifices which would even interfere with capital, the sacred treasure of the Mint-goddess itself.

"Do justly!" he said angrily; "do justly! That is a fitting Gentile return for generosity like mine. I give freely like a prince, and you call on me to do justly, as if I were a thief."

"My sister shall never be fettered by your gifts," said Siward hotly. "To-morrow you may count your bracelet again among your treasures."

But Esther had crept beside them while they were speaking, and now she laid one hand gently on her husband's arm, and one on Siward's hand.

"It was my bracelet, Siward," she said deprecatingly, "and my gift to the child I love. Let her keep it. It is hard enough to part from her. Do not rob me of the delight of serving her. And, believe me, Onias will do justly by thee," she added to Siward. "He means it. It is written in our law. To-morrow the contract shall

be made for your ransom. And, believe me, he will never wish to break it. For whom should we spare and toil and hoard? What has this life to offer us that we should dare to offend against our God?"

Her eyes shone with a deep glow which would have made Callias think rather of the inspired prophetesses than of the meek Hannahs or Ruths of her race.

But she had touched a chord which, while it vibrated in agony through her own heart, smote on the conscience of her husband with a power he dared not resist. She had associated herself with him in the responsibility and the peril.

And with trembling hand the next day he signed a contract, binding himself irrevocably to accept a certain ransom for Siward, whenever paid.

It was not an easy sum for Siward to earn, the greater portion of his toil having meantime to be exclusively for Onias. Yet from that day the weight of bondage passed from Siward's heart.

He saw before him freedom, with its noble, liberating work for his people; and between him and it nothing but the endurance of his own brave heart, and the toil of his own strong arm.

Once more he felt a man, not a chattel. Once more, in the light of this new hope of freedom, it became almost credible to him that there might be a free, living God, such as Esther believed in, and a Hope for Israel and for man, such as she had taught Hilda to cherish.



CHAPTER XXIV.

AGRIPPINA had entered (A.D. 30) on the last fatal period of her years of bereavement, the three years of her banishment in the island of Pandataria.

Those three years were spent by Tiberius in voluntary exile from the Rome he ruled and dreaded, among the twelve villas of the island of Capreæ; in such a paradise as men have constructed for themselves when they have determined to set at nought all the flaming swords of Divine law, to evade all the toil and travail and "sweat of the brow," and make an enchanted garden, full of all things pleasant to the eye and good for food, in the land of thorns and thistles, with themselves in the midst thereof, as gods, "knowing good and evil."

Those three years which, in Syria, in the wilderness of Temptation, on the Mount of Transfiguration, among the streets and hill-sides of Galilee and Judæa, were spent in regaining Paradise for man, by restoring man to God.

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At last the three years of Agrippina's exile were drawing near their close (A.D. 33).

The sisters Clœlia Pulchra and Diodora were alone together in a little chamber assigned to the Vestal, near the temple. They did not leave each other now.

Day or night the priestess would watch no more by the shrine, to guard the Sacred Fire for Rome.

The watching had fallen now to Clœlia Diodora. Day and night she guarded and cherished that precious Sacred Fire of life, which, guard and cherish it as she would, she knew too well was slowly dying in the heart of her sister.

She was just entering the door with a pitcher of fresh water from the old spring on the Cœlian Hill. Her sister had longed for it; and every morning now, along the paths where in former happy years the young priestess had borne the water for the shrine, the early light flaming through the bays or the vine-leaves on her buoyant form and joyous face, the same early sunbeams fell on the shrunken form and sad worn features of the deformed girl. But the ministry was certainly as high, and the heart as pure.

"It is almost a comfort, my Beautiful," Diodora said as she held the cool draught to the sufferer's parched lips, "that the old places we loved are so changed since you used to meet me among the vines and myrtles in the old garden. The garden is gone, and the old home swept away in the great fire. New trees and shrubs are there,

that throw no changing shadows yet on the dusty paths between the new walls. Even the Jews are gone from their dwellings by the Fountain of Egeria in the valley below. It is a comfort that things are changed and spoiled a little, now you cannot be there."

"Little sister," said the Vestal, rising on her pillows and fixing her large wistful eyes on the eyes which so ceaselessly watched her, "I have been thinking so long! And at last I must speak. Laon spoke to me once, long ago, of an old Jew who told you of a Hope his nation had cherished for thousands of years—a Hope he believed to be now near at hand. I have never spoken to you again of this; but I have never forgotten it. Year after year I have watched for some sign of this Deliverer. East and west, north and south, I have looked for tidings. Chiefly from the east. All in vain. Once I thought some hope might lie for Rome and the world in Germanicus. He seemed like one of our old heroes with a new Greek grace on him; his home pure as an old home of the republic.

"And again, once I heard the young German captive who rescued you on the day of the Triumph speak of a hero of his race to whom the Germans looked as a Liberator. And I thought, 'Perhaps Rome has sunk too low for any deliverance to come from her. From a young nation pure and strong, with men like that young German, frank and generous, and brave and true, and women like Siguna, a new life might spring for the world.'

"But Germanicus was poisoned at Antioch; Herman was assassinated by his own people among their own forests.

"North and south, and west and east, there comes no sign or sound; and the world grows ever worse. Did you ever see that Jew again? Tell me all you know. There can be no peril in any belief for me now. Even old Laon would not dread anything for me now."

"I saw the old Jew again," Diodora replied. "I never spoke to him of that Hope. But Siguna was with him when he died."

"He died without seeing any token of fulfilment?"

"She said he seemed to die reluctantly, chiefly because of that. He thought to have lived till the light dawned. But she said he evidently held the Hope as firmly as ever. And he said his daughter would see it."

"I would I could have seen him once," the Vestal said. "I feel as if he might have told me something I long to know. But now," she added despondingly, "all the Jews are banished from Rome. I shall die without seeing any good come to Rome and to the world. But I think I could die *not* reluctantly, if I had such a sure hope that it must come."

"He seemed to hold strange converse," Diodora resumed, "before he died, with One unseen, whom he feared and loved. He spoke as to some One who heard. Sometimes his terror and shrinking were great—greater, Siguna said, than she has seen among her people or ours.

It was as if his soul was awake in some wonderful way—as if he looked on dying, not as a dim slumber or a shadowy repetition of this life, but an awaking to intenser life. Sometimes he shrank with unutterable horror, as if from some great chasm that he saw clearly. And sometimes he seemed to see no chasm at all, but only God. And then he said and looked ‘Peace.’ And on his tomb, Siguna said—on the stone which covers the ledge where he was laid in the Jewish catacomb—he desired to have the word *Peace* engraven in Greek. She saw it on many stones there as well as on his. I never saw such words on any urn or sarcophagus of ours.”

“God!” said the Vestal. “God, and Peace!”

“I remember,” Diodora resumed, after a long pause, half reluctantly, “one of the songs of his people, which the old man said to me. It was full of an exulting passion of expectation and joy. Even in his feeble voice the words made me feel as if some great festive chorus were around me. Like all the songs he knew, it was sung to God. The fear, and tremulous expectation, and joy, and triumphant hope in those strange songs, all were hanging on God. This one was called a New Song. A thousand years old now, he said, but it sounded fresh as the lark’s this morning. It spoke of strength and beauty above all in God. There was the dashing of waves in it, the deep voice of forests, but all were full of rapturous gladness: the heavens, the rivers, the sea, the hills, the fields, the floods, rejoicing, clapping hands like children,

singing, shouting aloud for joy—all because He cometh, He cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world righteously.”

The Vestal raised herself on her arm, and her eyes grew deeper than ever, and shone with something of their old radiance.

“Clœlia, little sister, is not that reason enough? To judge the world righteously! If I were sure of that, I could die gladly—or, I think, I could scarcely die, for joy! Think of all the wrong! Think of that young German captive, so noble, and not yet safe even from the cross; of the millions of slaves; of the cries from the provinces; of the wickedness in the city; of Tiberius at Capreæ. ‘He cometh; He cometh,’ to judge the world righteously.”

She sank back on her cushions.

Diodora did not answer.

She was watching the weary face, again sunk into quiet; the long lashes of the closed eyelids shading the worn face.

She was thinking, not of the suffering world, but of the love that had been all in the world she cared for.

Clœlia Pulchra looked up again, and smiled into the tearful eyes.

“Would it not be good to know surely,” she said, taking her sister’s hand—“to *know* the world would be dealt fairly with at last?”

Then for once Diodora’s self-restraint gave way. She

threw herself on her knees by the side of the couch, and leaned her face on the thin hand she held.

“What do I care for the world, my Beautiful!” she said. “It is wicked, cruel, selfish. What would being judged do for it, except to sweep it away once for all! If some one would come and make it good, that would be something. Only too late; too late for thee and me! What should I care for the world if you were to leave it! It is of you I want to know. If some one would come and tell me where you are going, and how to get to you. Anywhere, anywhere—only to be sure we would find each other. If we were only together, I would not mind being a voiceless shade, or anything. We should never be voiceless shades to each other. We should make the world real for each other wherever we were. Just by living together, and by loving. But all the people in the world would be voiceless shades to me without thee. With thee the fire-rivers would be Olympian sunshine. But to be a bit of some great soul of the world! it were as well to be a bit of the dust of the world. This is the great terror. Oh, my sister, if some god would only tell me of thee, I would let the world be.”

There was a long silence. Slowly Diodora regained her self-control; her sobs ceased, and she knelt silently, still clasping the thin hand.

Not in prayer. The grief was suppressed, not soothed. She rose with lips firmly set to endure, but with no peace on her face.

The wistful eyes followed her as she moved quietly about the room, preparing some food. At last, when she brought it, Clœlia Pulchra, fixing her eyes on her, calmly said—

“Little sister, I have tried to serve my Rome; I fear not to much avail. I have tried to make thy burden lighter, and that, I think, I did. By all our love, promise me one thing before I go. Promise me you will not rush after me out of the world!”

Clœlia Diodora stood still, and turned pale, as if surprised and arrested in a hidden purpose.

“I do not think it wrong!” she said in a low voice. “It might be cowardly. But the bravest of our Rome have not thought so. Laon says his wise men thought it would be like a soldier deserting his post. But I know not what post has been given me in the world to keep, that any should be wronged by my deserting it. Nor know I who gave me such a post; or had a right to command me to stay.”

The dying priestess held the reluctant hand, and gazed on the half-averted eyes, until they turned to her.

“I have a strange unconquerable hope that One is coming,” she said. “I want you to stay and see. And I have a strange dim fear, lest, rushing after me unbidden, there should be none at hand to lead you, and we should lose each other in the dark, and search for each other for ever (if we live at all); and have no voice to call each other, and no hand to guide us to each other, and never

find each other more. Promise me, by our love, you will wait."

The poor face so lately convulsed with weeping quivered again.

"Do not ask it, my Beautiful! Anything but that! It was the only hope I had."

"Old Laon was good to you!" the priestess said, after a pause. "He saved you. He loves you. He looks to your kindness for his old age. He may grow blind and helpless, and want you to care for him as he cared for you."

"He would scarcely ask it. He would know what the world would be to me without you."

"He would not ask it. But he would *want* it, little sister!" she added very tenderly. "I have tried to be a loyal Roman maiden and keep my charge. I entreat you, do not abandon yours."

"Until Laon dies, then!" Diodora replied, hesitating.

"After that it cannot be long," the Vestal said. "For the sake of me—for the fear of missing each other in the dark—for the sake of quieting this fear of mine, if it be a childish fear—as you would go through any mockery or pain to bring me the smallest thing I wished for, go through that pain to save me this fear now."

A long silence. Then the compressed lips parted in the old radiant smile which made the worn face beautiful.

"For thy sake, yes! What are years of pain here-

after, to give thee a day's ease while I have thee? Would I not pour out my life in one drop to cool thy thirst? Shall I vow it to thee at any shrine?"

"Take my hands and kiss me and promise. That will be the surest vow."

"By our love, I promise," the younger sister said.

Clœlia Pulchra was satisfied. They knew nothing more sacred with which to seal the vow.

And soon afterwards the sufferer fell into a quiet sleep. When she awoke she said,—

"When great people die, there is generally an emancipation of slaves. A Vestal Virgin has some claims on Rome. I have never made any. That German captive who saved thee is no longer a slave of the Imperial house, but of some subject. I have been thinking I will ask it as my last request of Rome, that his ransom be paid. I should like to think he would be freed, when I am. Darling, say those dying words of the wise Athenian again."

Diodora repeated, as well as she could, the familiar words she had read so often to Laon.

"'But those who are found to have lived an eminently holy life, these are they who, being freed or set at large from these regions on the earth as from a prison, arrive at the pure abodes above; since our soul is certainly immortal.'

"And again: 'He thinks that I am he whom he shall shortly behold dead! But do you be sureties that when

I die I shall not remain, but shall depart to some happy state of the blessed, that when ye see my body either burned or buried, ye may not be afflicted for me, as though I suffered some dreadful thing, nor say at my interment that Socrates is laid out, or is carried out, or is buried.

“‘The soul is most certainly immortal and imperishable, and will really exist in the unseen world, *taking nothing with it but the discipline it has gained here.*’

“And then he spoke of our dwelling on this small earth, as ants or frogs about a marsh, and when we die getting wings, and rising to the large, pure, beautiful world on high.”

“Ah, little sister,” the Vestal said, “if we were sure of those wings! sure we have them growing in our souls! and that we (if we indeed live on) shall be indeed among those pure spirits who will soar, not sink! But this at least you will do for me; this, of which we can be sure. You will see that the German captive is set free. It will feel like dying for some good, like a soldier of our old Rome, to know that.”

That night, when the lamp burned low towards morning, the Vestal seemed to think she was alone, as in the old Vigils in the temple at night, for she said,—

“See, beautiful, pure, vestal stars, one by one, as you pass across my little space of sky! See, I, even I, have kept the fire and the sacred charge for Rome. Oh, boundless Heavens, I have kept my Hearth-fire for you!

Are ye keeping a hearth-fire for me? This fire I have kept is not me; I have but kept it burning. And these starry fires are not you. Beyond, within, beyond are ye! I am coming! Give me some little fire still to keep bright for the world! Give me some great heart where I may rest!"

And then, when the flickering lamp died out and the calm morning broke, her spirit seemed to come into daylight, and she said, going back with the clear gaze of those who are departing,—

"The German captive will be free. It may seem, after all, like my old dream, when the Clœlia, who swam the river and saved the children, appeared to me and told me my life would be like the stream our forefather brought from the Alban hills to Rome. I thought it might then. But perhaps all it has really done is to fill two cups of cold water; living to fill one fresh for thee morning by morning, and dying to purchase one for him who saved thee. Yet even that is something."

And after a pause she went on in a low voice,—

"He will be free. And perhaps, perhaps, I shall be free too;—out of prison and free and winged, and know about you, and wait for you. If there were only some One there before to wait for me, to receive me! Perhaps! It is a dark long journey to go on a 'perhaps.' Little sister, be near me when I go. Let me know that brave heart will fear bondage no more, nor the scourge nor the cross. Let me know your hand is in mine. And let me

think that perhaps my life has been a stream of refreshment to you and to him ; my life and my death. And that perhaps, perhaps Socrates was right about the soul and her wings, and the old Jew about the Hope. 'For He cometh. He cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world righteously.' "





CHAPTER XXV.

IN the Sacred Pomœrium—the space marked out by religious rites along the line of the ancient wall, where divinations and auguries for the City were taken, where no unhallowed thing must rest—they laid the ashes of Clœlia the Vestal, as things sacred, belonging to Heaven and to Rome.

Thither Clœlia Diodora crept morning and evening; and there she watched through many a night. Free from fear of evil: free from fear, as those are free for whom life has no longer any hope. What could the worst enemy do more for her than break those fetters to life, which she had vowed never to break for herself?

Her sorrow was at least allowed to flow in an unbroken tide. With her sister's life, all worth calling life in her own had ended. It was she herself who had been burned in that funeral pyre—whose heart lay smouldering in ashes, being burned for ever, yet unconsumed. Love and Duty, with her, had been slain together. For her there were no tender claims, no inevitable small necessities and

cares, plucking her back to every-day life. No one would miss her, and she was neglecting nothing, if, from morning to night, from night till morning, she kept ceaseless watch by her dead.

Her one charge in life had ended before life. Henceforth her whole existence might be as this Pomœrium—a sacred waste in the midst of the Great City, once ploughed with the sacred plough of Hope, now dedicated to the Past, to Sacred Rites, and to the Dead.

If there were none to weep with her, and say "Weep not," with compassionate voice, almighty in two worlds, like Him whom yet she knew not; there were also none to say, with dry eyes, and dry, unmoved voice, like Tiberius—"Weep not; tears in moderation are excusable, even desirable: you have shed enough; now return to pleasure." There were none to say (as if there were consolation in a comparative anatomy of torture), "Your cup is not bitterer than many others;" or, with smooth self-complacency and easy sentimental tears, "Ah! I have tasted it too;" or, with comfortable optimism of shallow religiousness, "It is not really bitter—taken aright, it is sweet" (as if a certain sweet spiritual flavour were what we wanted, and not love, the old love, bitter or sweet).

Every one knew she had lost all; and those who cared enough to think about it felt that the only refuge for her would be to die also, and thought, if she had courage enough, that was in her own power.

Neither had she any inward conflicts between weak, would-be faith and mighty existing misery. Strong, in a deep, unbroken tide, the great sorrow swept over her; consciously stifled and drowning in it, blinded and stunned with it, yet unable to faint or sink.

She believed the gods (if there were gods)—those sunny, smiling Olympians—had been unjust, merciless, cruel to her: to her, and to the pure beautiful Being who had been ready to give her life to them. She believed it without reserve, and said it to herself without self-reproach. She dashed bitter words of accusation up against that sky of brass; faintly comforting herself sometimes with the thought that there were some behind it who could hear, and might be stung amidst their bliss,—if only stung to a little scornful smile on the smooth lips amidst their feasting.

The darkest times of all were when she felt that no cries of her anguish could reach any one, either to awaken pity or scorn; that she was, after all, but as a puling child striking its helpless, wounded hands against the stone that had wounded it.

She felt, not stricken only, but wronged; wronged as she (imbittered though her heart was) would, she knew, have wronged no one. Her whole life had been one wrong. Why had she been imprisoned without crime in the joyless dungeon of this misshapen flesh? Why had drops, not of bitterness only, but of venom, been distilling all these years into her heart? Why, now, had the only

hand that warded them from her heart been smitten and made powerless? Her whole being was in a tumult of revolt, and she did not attempt to still it. In the loneliness of the Pomœrium, by that sacred urn, the tempest within made the silence tumultuous. The noise of the City, the perilous thronging of the crowd in the narrow streets, the eager cries and voices of the multitude in the Forum, seemed stiller than this solitude. With the silencing of that one voice, all human creatures had become voiceless shades to her.

"You are all nothing but masks," she thought. "Some of you *seem* to be cherished children, beloved brides, happy mothers, strong men. But it is all seeming. You only *seem* to be children, brides, mothers. You *are* mere perishing, mortal creatures. Soon you will all have to lay aside your masks, and become like my Beautiful."

With a kind of bitter triumph, she saw another King enthroned above all the tumult of the City and the pomp of the Palatine.

"Not Tiberius," she said. "Death, and only Death, is the Universal Lord."

There were times when she felt the existence of the meanest living creature a cruel wrong to her Dead. She grudged to all the life her Beloved had lost, and which she could not lose. There were times, again, when she had a fierce joy in the thought how brief the seeming advantage of the living was.

"Soon, soon," she said, "you will all be crumbled into

just such a little urn as this. The majority are there already—the best, the bravest.”

She felt her heart slowly turning into ice. And this was the only terror left. She dreaded lest she should grow bitter and malignant, like other distorted and baffled creatures from whom hope had died, and so grow unlike and estranged from her Beloved.

Yet one day, when she sat weighed down by this fear, crouched on the ground, and near her a poor bird was helplessly struggling in a snare, beating its wings, and piteously chirping, with tender, deft fingers she untwisted the snare, and set the trembling captive free.

“It is worth while setting *you* free,” she said, as if apologizing to herself, as it flew upwards, knowing nothing of its liberator; “you have wings!”

Yet that little act of kindness reacted, stirred the dying embers, brought a little warmth about her heart; and with that the thought of Siward. She wondered if freedom would, after all, be any boon to him. She felt it was sweet he should owe it to her Beloved.

She had written a letter to old Laon about Siward's ransom; and wondered, with a dreamy, languid wonder, what he would write or do in consequence—if he would care enough to come to her in her misery. And with the thought of Laon came visions of the little dark room behind the workshop.

“I could be a *hand* again for him, perhaps,” she thought; “and perhaps one day a *voice* (she wished me

to serve him); never more a heart or a soul for any one."

Then her mind reverted to the wise words Laon had taught her.

"I used to think I could launch fearless hence into the unknown, like Socrates, on that hope, and risk all on that hazard," she thought; "and I still could. But to trust her to it is another thing. To trust her to a Perhaps!

"How do I know that the other world, if there be one, is not another Capreæ, with another Tiberius holding all the worlds bound and trembling in the capricious cruelty of fear, as he holds Rome?

"If not, how comes there to be a Capreæ here?"

And in the confusion and dimness of that land of the terrible Shadow, with the rush of its advancing, devouring tides ever in her ears, a wild longing to see the unseen took possession of her; to see at any price, anything of the future world, which had become the present world to her Beloved.

Before the Olympians, old legends said, had reigned the Titans.

It was said there were regions where the Titans still reigned. If this dim, transitory world of ours was a world of shadows to the gods, below this world was a yet dimmer under-world, which seemed a world of shadows to us.

There, still reigned in awful solemnity the ancient

gods, all that were left of the dethroned dynasty, with a mystic majesty about them, their grand forms gigantic and dim in the stationary twilight, which never faded and never dawned, the gray fathers and mothers of the gods—blind, some of them, some of them in torments, yet royal, and reigning, through all the defeat and pain, in a dim, lurid land of fire and night.

How far had their dethronement been the consequence of the necessary growth of things, and how far a wrong? Was there a faint pulse of hope throbbing through that under-world, as now in some hearts in the dark world of Tiberius Cæsar—a faint hope of some far-off dim rescue by a Deliverer in strange sympathy with man, and with those ancient dethroned powers?

Long she mused on the old legends, as she kept those long, lonely vigils by the tomb.

For in some dim way that under-world was bound up with men. This Hades, the exile and abode of dethroned gods, was also the place of exile, and yet the longest abode of men. The Empire of the Titans was the empire of the dead.

If her sister Clœlia the Vestal had been banished, like the Princess Agrippina, to the island of Pandataria, what interest would the fairest cities and paradises of the world have had for her compared with the seas and shores around that lonely, barren isle!

How she would have haunted the nearest shores, and treasured the faintest rumours brought by the fishermen

who had coasted near those inhospitable shores, and traversed sea and land to have a few minutes' intercourse with any one who had returned thence!

For even that imperial prison, with its moat of seas, did indeed sometimes yield up its exiles.

Could it be possible that there might be some rumours to be gathered even of that land of shadows, the Pandataria of the gods? In her childhood dark, wild terrors had haunted certain places, and times, and people. She had heard of incantations and fearful half-barbarous rites powerful to evoke the dead; of divinations into the future.

There were caverns among the hills, one it was said even on the Roman Aventine, which led no one had fathomed whither, haunted by strange voices. There were legends of mountains having throbbed and quivered, as if some gigantic heart beat beneath them. There were fountains which bubbled up hot and turbid, as if they were escaping from some fiery world below.

Could these be gateways into that under-world?

For her all their terror was gone.

What were earthquakes, and thunders, and sulphureous flames, and angry infernal voices as of monsters disturbed in uneasy sleep, and all the vulgar terrors which guarded those approaches to the unknown, to her?

For her, all visionary terrors had vanished before the memory of that one beautiful, peaceful, irresponsible face, and those still cold hands. If this under-world were

indeed the dwelling-place of her sister, the darkest witch-cavern that led to it would to her be brighter than the sunniest porch of the brightest home on earth, more home-like than its inmost hearth.

The more she mused on it, the more fascination that dim under-world had for her.

Olympus, with its golden thrones, its sunny heights, its easy, feasting, joyous revellers, faded into a childish poesy, a nursery ballad ; Apollo, Aurora, Diana, and even Jove, seemed mere children, mere transitory beings, beside those solemn, gray old gods of the older sway.

The real world was not on Olympus, whose gods and goddesses might dissolve into morning clouds, into sunbeams and moonbeams ; it was not *here*, in this world of stage-players, of dust and delusions ; but *below*, where the ancient gods reigned, and men had to abide for ever ; that awful permanent world with its rivers of fire and of forgetfulness, its dim, fair fields, lighted not by sun or moon.

The mystic name of Hecate came to her again and again, as if muttered in hollow caverns of the past. She remembered how Damaris, the Athenian slave, used to mutter it in low tones, to the terror of her childhood.

Hecate, older than all the gods adored in fair marble temples ; though worshipped only in caves and dark places of the earth. Having had a right to reign as much prior to that of Jove, as that of Jove to Tiberius Cæsar. And, according to general belief, reigning still.

Reigning in the under-world. And, it was rumoured, not only there. Honoured even by the immortal gods. Worshipped with secret mystic rites, dimly looming on the eyes of men in monstrous symbolical forms—three-headed, with the face of a horse, of a dog, of a lion. Reigning over the spirits of the dead, but also over the chase, and the sea; able to bestow good on the young, to whom this sunlit world was still the reality; herself the goddess of the moon, of night, of the unseen.

Recollections came on her, too, of ancient mysteries at Eleusis, giving hope, it was said, of the future life; and of Oriental mystics—Essenes, Therapeutæ—mystics who held the body to be a prison, and death a liberation.

She determined to travel anywhere, and go through anything, to be initiated.

And meantime there were still necromancers and magicians at Rome.

Banished by edict after edict, the anxious hearts of men called them back again and again. Emperors condemned and consulted them. When, on the height of prosperity, the sense of the hidden precipices around made the brain dizzy, and the very brightness of the present made the future a dread, the strongest and most matter-of-fact intellects yielded to the fascination of a promised glimpse into the darkness before them. Through the stars, through the throbbing hearts of slain beasts, through voices in oracular caverns, through magic rings and mirrors—any outlet was sought from

the uncertainty which shrouds the next step of the securest and sunniest life.

Or, again, when all the best light and warmth had passed from the present, and the personal future, as with Clœlia Diodora, had ceased to interest because it could not restore the past, then a deeper and mightier fascination drew the heart to those who professed to be able to pierce not merely the mists of the future, but the deeper darkness of present death—to tell, not what we shall be, but what and where our beloved are.

With passionate longing the deformed girl sought to wrest the dark secret from one magician after another, spending her little patrimony on one gloomy rite after another, lavishing any money they asked her on the sacrifices, which the witches said were required to open the lips of the silent gods.

But none of these rites brought her the slightest comfort.

Darkness, and sudden bursts of lurid light, and sanguinary rites, and hollow voices in the depths of caverns, and dim apparitions, and all the paraphernalia of vulgar horrors, had no terrors for her. They did not thrill her with any tremor, or quicken the beating of her heart. Hope might indeed have dazzled her perception, but not fear. And such hope as would have stirred her, they never succeeded in awakening.

She believed it possible that those old unknown gods might be moved by such mysterious rites. But when

the magicians professed to evoke the dead, and give her messages from her sister, she only smiled.

“Lethe and Styx and Elysium, rivers of fire or of forgetfulness, could not change her thus!” she said. “If she is there, she is *herself* there. And this is not herself.”

The daylight and reality of that pure love were still too strong around her heart for shadows of the twilight to deceive her.

Yet she went from one vain promise to another. Each time to return more hopeless to her watch by the urn in the Pomœrium, and there to keep lonely watch again, until the loneliness weighed on her like a roof of solid darkness,—the old longing came back to her to lift it or pierce it by any means,—and once more she would roam restlessly about to seek some new entrance into that solemn under-world.

At last one name was mentioned to her, as that of no vulgar witch, but of a mighty foreign sorceress, who had learned in Thessaly spells of irresistible potency, which would compel the infernal powers, and even Hecate herself, to surrender the secrets of the under-world.

One still gray night she met this woman alone by appointment in a clearing of a wood near the Tiber, a place avoided by day and never approached at night by the people around on account of dark memories of treacherous murder which haunted it.

On one side lay a pool, left by the river when at high

flood, deep and sullen, with unwholesome stagnant growths, only swept at rare intervals by the tide of fresh waters.

Around was a marsh, treacherous with mud and black pools, where frogs croaked, and slimy creatures crept and plashed. Through the shades of the neighbouring bushes rose a cross with a blackened horror still hanging on it. Underneath was a mound of dank suspicious greenness ; murderer and murdered, it was believed, compelled thus perpetually to haunt each other.

The sorceress did not heed Diodora on her first approach. She seemed to be gathering poisonous herbs. When she perceived the deformed girl, she rose to the full height of her majestic stature. Her black unkempt hair fell in masses on her shoulders, making a not altogether unintentional resemblance to the snakes of the Furies. Her dark keen eyes gleamed with a penetrating flash, like those of a beast of prey, more phosphorescent than human, as they rested on the misshapen figure.

"Such as thou," she said, in a hollow voice, grasping Diodora's arm with a muscular grasp in her one hand, whilst a knife gleamed in her other hand—"such as thou and such as I ought to suit. Of such are the sacrifices whose blood delights those we seek."

Diodora's arm was bruised in her grasp, but she did not shrink. Her frank deep eyes met those of the sorceress with a courage as determined as her own.

"What dost thou want of me?" the Thessalian re-

sumed. "Love potions are scarcely for thee. It can scarcely be a question of a rival! Hast thou an enemy thou wouldst be avenged upon?"

"I have no one wrong to avenge," said Diodora. "The world has not been my friend. But there is vengeance and misery enough in it to satisfy the most malignant. To watch the end that must come to all the joy would be enough. We need not act."

"What wouldst thou have, then?" the sorceress said. "Such payment as thou wouldst offer is not likely to reward me. I might have given thee vengeance for nothing. Such work is its own reward. I, at all events, have wrongs which make one drop of vengeance sweet."

"I do not want to make any one more wretched," Diodora said. "I do not hope to be made happy. I only want to *know*."

"To know what is to happen to thee?" asked the sorceress scornfully. "Can that matter so much? Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

"To know what is happening to my sister," was the low-toned reply.

Merely to mention that dear name to such ears seemed to desecrate it; yet, having come so far, she would not give up the hope.

"They tell me you have learned potent charms in Thessaly, strong to pierce the unseen."

"Blood of innocent babes, eyelids of murderers, such as he you see rotting there in the thicket."

And she ran through a ghastly catalogue of horrors. Diodora shuddered ; but her lip curled scornfully.

“ I thought you knew some mighty words of old ! ” she said at last, turning away. “ I will never pollute her memory with vulgar witches’ cruelties. I will never believe *she* is in the power of beings who could be propitiated by such abominations.”

“ You will never believe ! ” laughed the sorceress scornfully. “ Are things changed by your or my believing ? Will your not believing the iniquities of Capreæ make it pure ? I know at least some of the secrets of *that* under-world. Why should not poisons and spells be as acceptable to the Powers of the ancient under-world as to that ? ”

Clœlia Diodora paused a moment. The sorceress had but given utterance to a dread that had often vaguely haunted her own heart. But the very utterance seemed to show its incredibility. She replied deliberately,—

“ She would not have had me rescue her even from Tiberius by such means as you speak of. Now that I cannot rescue her, wherever she is, I will never dishonour her memory by gratifying my own longing to know, at such a cost.”

And she turned away.

But again the strong grasp was on her arm, and this time the knife flashed, and between closed teeth the sorceress hissed the words before her face,—

“ You are an Informer. You have been bribed to

betray me to the Emperor. You shall not leave this so easily. There is something you can give me worth my having. And that is your misshapen self."

Clœlia smiled, something of the old radiant smile, without scorn or malice.

"Thus you would fulfil my longing indeed," she said. "There is one way in which you can open to me secrets I long for. Dying, I shall know; for perhaps I shall meet my dead. We shall know together, my Vestal, my Beautiful!"

The fierce grasp relaxed, and the fierce features relaxed also.

"Child," said the sorceress, after a pause, "you want what I cannot give. You have what I cannot give—cannot give back to myself." And the hard hands covered the rigid face. "You have love. Such courage comes only from love, or from despair." When love died to me, I found another way from despair. But the love was different. Go, and come not near to reproach me again."

Slowly the maiden retraced her steps through the solitary wood, and not till late that night did she reach the place of her vigils in the Pomœrium. There she clasped the marble once more, and felt almost as if she were pressing her cheek against the dear sisterly hand.

"See, my Beautiful," she said; "I would not purchase even tidings of thee by anything thou wouldst not have had me do. Surely I cannot grow nearer thee by grow-

ing wicked." And ere long she fell into a heavy exhausted sleep, with something of the feeling of one who sleeps on a battle-field after a victory, leaning against the stone.

And there the next morning old Laon, and Siguna, returned from her long fruitless search in the North for Olave, found the poor crouching form with the worn face pressed against the Vestal's tomb. They watched her long in silence. Sleep seemed so absolutely the only repose left her on earth, that at first they, who loved and pitied her so truly, rather hoped than feared that sleep might prove the long last sleep.

But before the dawn had quite passed into day she awoke. Half rising, but still leaning against the marble, she stretched out a hand to each.

"You have not found anything!" she said, meeting Siguna's wistful gaze. "I have lost everything. Laon, Laon!" she exclaimed, passionately, rising and throwing herself at his feet, "take me to Athens. Socrates was content with guessing, thinking. But that was only for himself. I must know! *know!* Somewhere, somewhere the secret must have pierced through, if there is any secret to know. Let me be initiated in the mysteries. Men say they speak tidings there of the dead. Take me to Athens, to the ancient mysteries, that I may know."

"Child," he said, mournfully, "was not Socrates at Athens? What could the mysteries there tell thee but

that thousands of years since men hoped, as thou and I must hope now? There is but one way by which men enter in and know."

She fixed her eyes with a deprecatory look on his, almost as if defending herself against an accusation of cowardice. "I think you are right," she said. "But *that way* I promised her never to open to myself. She made me promise, for her sake and for yours, Laon."

The old man's eyes moistened.

"She thought of old Laon then at the last," he said.

"And of Siward," she replied. "Is her wish fulfilled?"

"At first the proud boy had a struggle with himself," Laon said, with a choked voice; "he had all but earned his own emancipation. And he remembered words she spoke to him years since in my old workshop. Freedom, she had said, was better earned than given. But at last he consented to accept the boon. From her dying hands, he told me to tell you, he deemed his freedom a more sacred treasure than if he had won it with his own. There was a strange bond between those two," he added. "The boy has moved about gently and gravely as a woman since he heard she was gone. He said the sweetest light the world had held, or would ever hold, for him, had died out of it for ever."

And Siguna the mother did not resent the words.



CHAPTER XXVI.

ONCE more Siguna was sailing eastward over the Mediterranean Sea. Her last voyage had been as a slave in the household of Germanicus the Conqueror, with Siward and little Hilda, all in bondage.

Thirteen years had passed, and now the three were free.

Siward was keeping the armourer's workshop at Antioch, which was to be the support of his mother, of old Laon, and of Clælia Diodora. But it was to Hilda's little household the mother's heart most yearned, to the three fair children growing up around her child and Callias.

Siguna had grown graver and more abstracted since her fruitless search for Olave in the North. Not that the hope of yet seeing him again in life had died from her heart. It had only been driven deeper in. Some day, she still believed, she should hear the familiar voice again. And it was her fixed intention (though she communicated it to no one), when she had seen her children

at Antioch, to return and dwell at Rome, that not one company of captives might arrive from the North which she might not see and question.

The sight of the Grecian cities and islands recalled to her many things in the past. She thought of the brilliant life cut short, and the noble, manly form laid low at Epidaphne. She thought of the lofty spirit, then so full of song and love, that could not be broken by years of peril and suspicion and petty household tyranny, now hopelessly wearing itself out in the solitary exile of Pandataria. She hoped, with trembling, that the little share of prosperity and happiness which had come to her Hilda was not bright enough to arouse the "envy of the gods."

Many consultations, meanwhile, did she and Laon hold how it would be possible to awaken, not to pleasure (that mattered little), but to something of living interest, the poor bereaved girl.

Laon's heart was very heavy on her account. He was conscious of having felt a little thrill of satisfaction at the thought of having his child entirely to himself.

For some time he would not confess it ; but at last, as they left Athens, he said to Siguna, into whose quiet heart every one naturally poured their troubles,—

"I had thought, foolish old man that I was, that I could yet give her bright days. I had furnished the little home at Antioch as daintily for her as I knew how, and had reserved a little stock of coin wherewith she

might purchase those fancies and finishes that women love, that she might think she had made it bright for me herself, as women like to do. I had visions of her rich soft voice ringing through the rooms in her old Latin lays and Greek songs, making it more musical to me than all the groves of Epidaphne. And I thought Siward would listen as we worked. And now she is not here at all! Far nearer me when I was at Antioch toiling for her, and she at Rome with the Vestal. See how her spirit is wandering far, far away! Seeing, she sees not; and hearing, she hears not; living, she lives not. The whole world has become ghostly to her."

"She is very gentle and kind," said Siguna, apologetically. "She tries hard to be with us, and to do what she can for you."

"The more she tries to hide it from me, the more I feel it," he replied. "She will work for me, read to me, listen, talk to me; anything but *live*. The little fragment of her life and love I had while her sister lived, was worth more than the whole of her thoughts and time now. For it was a living portion of her living self. And now she is but as a ghost unnaturally compelled by some witch's art to animate again a wounded body it was panting to leave, to erect itself, and move and speak in a ghastly semblance of life far more terrible than death."

"Even here, in this Athens," he continued, "that we loved to speak about together in the old days at Rome,

as if to see it together would be a joy too great for her to hope for, she cared for none of the glorious temples, the hills, the battle-fields, the statues, the groves I had told her of until she knew them as familiarly as the way from the Cœlian to her sister in the Temple of Vesta, or to my workshop. Only once she awoke from that courteous attention in which she sits as a guest perpetually entertained at some stranger's board, to something of her old eager intensity. It was in the cave of the Eumenides. 'Men believed this was a portal to the under-world,' she said. 'Here I should like to stay and die.' And she knelt down and embraced the stones. That gloomy cave was fairer to her than the Parthenon. It was more home-like than that little home at Antioch will ever be, the home I have been preparing her with such love and hope for years."

Thus these three wrecks, tossed together by winds and waves from shores so far apart, drifted on to the shores of Syria, knowing nothing of what awaited them there.





CHAPTER XXVII.

THE autumn sun was shining tranquilly on Judæa ; in the valleys, on silent fields, lately laughing and singing with the songs of harvest, now gray with stubble ; on the hill-sides, on lonely vineyards, with their gathered grapes and their deserted lodges and towers, lately echoing with the shouts of the vintage, and on olive-groves lightened of their fruit. The corn, the wine, and the oil had been gathered in. And the blank and stillness of the old age of autumn had succeeded the festivities of its youth.

Yet there seemed to the three travellers something more than the usual autumnal quiet over the land. In the villages the clatter of their asses' hoofs on the Roman roads brought out only a few women and little children, and occasionally an infirm old man, to gaze on them.

Now and then an eager group passed them laden with bunches of citron, with palm branches, or boughs of the gray willows from the brooks.

"It is some feast of the Jews," Laon said ; "some of

the patriotic gatherings by which their wise old lawgiver bound them together."

When they reached the City they found it transformed into a garden, into a semblance of that golden Jerusalem where the Paradise and the city are blended ; with the fountains clear as crystal, the leaves of the trees with twelve manner of fruit in the midst of the street, and the light of the perpetual festival making night as bright as day.

The flat roofs were embowered in thick foliage. The courts of the houses and of the Temple, and even the streets, were green with branches entwined into temporary dwellings. The whole city had become a forest, the inhabitants children of the forest. The imagination of Siguna, the child of the Northern forest, went back to her old woodland home in the Lippe valley.

"Were these Jews also," she asked of Laon, "once foresters, as we Germans are ? Do they keep this feast in remembrance of their early home ?"

But Laon was never communicative concerning the Jews ; and Siguna was left to her own conjectures for an explanation.

Few of the branches were such as her own forests could have furnished. Glossy myrtle boughs were entwined with gray olive branches ; some of the huts were roofed altogether with palms ; some leafy bowers there were of sycamore and pine. There was a variety in the size as in the foliage. The Feast being a family festival, as those of the Hebrew nation were, these bowers were

little temporary homes, adapted to the numbers or the wealth of the family: some, humble little dwarf huts; some, vaults of greenery twenty feet high.

Evening and morning joyous bands made processions through the streets, carrying large bunches of fruit; fathers, mothers, youths, and maidens, and little children.

In the morning vessels of water were carried from a fountain of Siloam, and poured, with wine, in libations on the altar.

At night the city was lighted up with countless lamps and torches gleaming among the green bowers, or borne with song and dance through the streets, as they went in festive procession by the Beautiful Gate to the Court of the Women. Then all the light of the city seemed concentrated around the Four Great Lamps which illuminated the Temple, and cast their radiance far and wide from the Temple heights over cloister, courts, and embowered roofs.

There, around the Great Light of the Temple of the City, while the priests played on instruments and chanted sacred songs on the steps leading to the inner courts, the nation gathered together in families. When the music of the priests ceased, the people waved their boughs of golden fruit, the citrons shining among the glossy leaves; and the sacred courts echoed with family and national rejoicing, with the dance and song of the people, who were taught (had they only understood it!) to connect all their rejoicings with home and with God.

The joy of harvest, the joy of rest after toil, of a home after long wanderings, in memory of that first Feast of Tabernacles, when their fathers at Succoth left the brown tents of the wilderness for the leafy bowers of their own Promised Land,—all this was flowing in symbol beneath the hilarity of that most poetical festival. And to many a thoughtful eye, no doubt, which had “kept watch o’er man’s mortality,” it brought thoughts of the transitory nature of all earthly homes (all indeed tabernacles, so soon to be taken down, and fading before they fall): vibrations of the deep music of the ancient singers trembling through all the mirth,—“A stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were;” perhaps also dim visions of a rest yet to come.

Even Clœlia Diodora (by a perversity inherent in woman, Laon thought) woke up to something like interest in this strange transformation of the City into the Forest.

“Legends, mere legends of an obscure, boastful tribe!” Laon would say in answer to her inquiries. “Why should you wish to know? They have a tradition of years of wandering through a great wilderness, of bread rained on them from heaven, of desert rocks made to burst forth in living springs for their thirst. The histories of all people have their birth-place in some far-off land of mist and marvel. All people have their festivities, more or less mystical and rapturous, at the ingathering of the harvest, in spring, and in autumn. Only this people has inter-

woven its history more skilfully than most with the worship of Nature, and has the advantage of purifying its festivities by coming to them in families."

But the whole joyous scene made a deep impression on the Roman maiden. Unlike most joy, it did not jar upon her. There ran through it a tone of patriotic fervour and of religious solemnity which touched her.

Moreover, she could not get out of her mind the sacred songs of the old Jew by the Fountain of Egeria.

She interpreted this national rejoicing through the look of love and joy she had seen on his face.

And again and again she entreated Siguna to tell her every detail of that stranger's dying hours; again and again, as a child listens unwearied to a favourite story.

The story of that spirit meeting death so solemnly awake, fearing as Siguna had never seen any of her people fear, hoping as none they knew had ever hoped, fearing and loving some One he was going to meet in that unseen world, was more to Diodora than anything.

And here in this festive City, by that Temple towards which the old man used to turn, the tones of his thin feeble voice came back to her, as if echoed by the voice of a great multitude; until one night she said to Siguna, as to Laon at the cave of the Eumenides,—

"Here I should like to stay and live or die. It seems to me as if the entrance to that unseen world might after all be here, even here."

Neither of them knew anything of the sacrificial rites

on which these festivities were based ; how, evening and morning, the slain lamb yielded up its meek life on the altar ; and not wine only and pure water, but the blood of a spotless victim had to flow there.

Not sheaves of ripe corn only and bunches of golden fruit, not joy only and thanksgiving and the voice of melody, waved and echoed through those cloistered courts. Life was sacrificed there daily, not with ease and joy, but in pain and death.

The worship of that Temple was no glittering garlanded ice-palace, suspended over the unrecognized abyss.

It dared to recognize the chasms which rend humanity without and within. It dared to look in the face the terrible mystery which characterizes our race from all creatures in the universe, separating it from the instinctive innocent life below, and from the holy love of the life above. It dared to look this terrible distinction in the face, and to name it ;—to call it *sin*, a “treading over” holy barriers of Divine law, a “falling short” of a holy ideal of goodness, a “going astray” from the living God.

It dared to call this world, not a Paradise, but a wilderness ; and our race a race of exiles and pilgrims ; and to appeal to generation after generation as wandering and fallen from something they should and might have been.

It dared perpetually to bear witness to the mystery of sin and the need of reconciliation, by the perpetual sacrifices offered in its Temple.

And at the same time it dared to bear perpetual witness by its prophets to the worthlessness of these sacrifices, in themselves, to please Him who could only be pleased by the sacrifice of self, by the death of sin and the life of righteousness, by ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

Of this the Roman maiden and the German mother as yet knew little.

But Laon, going in and out among the crowd, impatient to pursue his journey, yet unable in the excitement of the national festival to find any means of doing so, began to be aware of a tremor of unusual expectation agitating the multitudes to and fro, as if something were wanting to complete the feast.

Not loud, eager discussion, as of some political event, acknowledged and expected by all; not dark, fierce words, as in one of the countless national conspiracies against the Roman rule, which kept the vacillating governor in such ceaseless anxiety between his desire to please the Emperor and the Jews. The province for the time was tranquil, whatever volcanic fires might be slumbering beneath. The considerate policy of Tiberius Cæsar in keeping the same governor longer than usual in office, that the publicans who lived on the provinces, "as flies on a wounded man," being left in peace, might be satiated, had in its measure succeeded. The images of Cæsar and his Eagle standards were still kept far from Jerusalem. Pilate having irritated the Jews by trans-

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The joy of harvest, the joy of rest after toil, of a home after long wanderings, in memory of that first Feast of Tabernacles, when their fathers at Succoth left the brown tents of the wilderness for the leafy bowers of their own Promised Land,—all this was flowing in symbol beneath the hilarity of that most poetical festival. And to many a thoughtful eye, no doubt, which had “kept watch o’er man’s mortality,” it brought thoughts of the transitory nature of all earthly homes (all indeed tabernacles, so soon to be taken down, and fading before they fall): vibrations of the deep music of the ancient singers trembling through all the mirth,—“A stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were;” perhaps also dim visions of a rest yet to come.

Even Clœlia Diodora (by a perversity inherent in woman, Laon thought) woke up to something like interest in this strange transformation of the City into the Forest.

“Legends, mere legends of an obscure, boastful tribe!” Laon would say in answer to her inquiries. “Why should you wish to know? They have a tradition of years of wandering through a great wilderness, of bread rained on them from heaven, of desert rocks made to burst forth in living springs for their thirst. The histories of all people have their birth-place in some far-off land of mist and marvel. All people have their festivities, more or less mystical and rapturous, at the ingathering of the harvest, in spring, and in autumn. Only this people has inter-

woven its history more skilfully than most with the worship of Nature, and has the advantage of purifying its festivities by coming to them in families."

But the whole joyous scene made a deep impression on the Roman maiden. Unlike most joy, it did not jar upon her. There ran through it a tone of patriotic fervour and of religious solemnity which touched her.

Moreover, she could not get out of her mind the sacred songs of the old Jew by the Fountain of Egeria.

She interpreted this national rejoicing through the look of love and joy she had seen on his face.

And again and again she entreated Siguna to tell her every detail of that stranger's dying hours; again and again, as a child listens unwearied to a favourite story.

The story of that spirit meeting death so solemnly awake, fearing as Siguna had never seen any of her people fear, hoping as none they knew had ever hoped, fearing and loving some One he was going to meet in that unseen world, was more to Diodora than anything.

And here in this festive City, by that Temple towards which the old man used to turn, the tones of his thin feeble voice came back to her, as if echoed by the voice of a great multitude; until one night she said to Siguna, as to Laon at the cave of the Eumenides,—

"Here I should like to stay and live or die. It seems to me as if the entrance to that unseen world might after all be here, even here."

Neither of them knew anything of the sacrificial rites

on which these festivities were based ; how, evening and morning, the slain lamb yielded up its meek life on the altar ; and not wine only and pure water, but the blood of a spotless victim had to flow there.

Not sheaves of ripe corn only and bunches of golden fruit, not joy only and thanksgiving and the voice of melody, waved and echoed through those cloistered courts. Life was sacrificed there daily, not with ease and joy, but in pain and death.

The worship of that Temple was no glittering garlanded ice-palace, suspended over the unrecognized abyss.

It dared to recognize the chasms which rend humanity without and within. It dared to look in the face the terrible mystery which characterizes our race from all creatures in the universe, separating it from the instinctive innocent life below, and from the holy love of the life above. It dared to look this terrible distinction in the face, and to name it ;—to call it *sin*, a “treading over” holy barriers of Divine law, a “falling short” of a holy ideal of goodness, a “going astray” from the living God.

It dared to call this world, not a Paradise, but a wilderness ; and our race a race of exiles and pilgrims ; and to appeal to generation after generation as wandering and fallen from something they should and might have been.

It dared perpetually to bear witness to the mystery of sin and the need of reconciliation, by the perpetual sacrifices offered in its Temple.

And at the same time it dared to bear perpetual witness by its prophets to the worthlessness of these sacrifices, in themselves, to please Him who could only be pleased by the sacrifice of self, by the death of sin and the life of righteousness, by ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

Of this the Roman maiden and the German mother as yet knew little.

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Clœlia drank in every word. But she said no more.

The next day, the old man came back more silent than usual. During the evening meal he said nothing, or only some light words about their journey.

Afterwards he paced up and down the chamber restlessly. He felt Clœlia's questioning eyes on him, and she felt the uneasiness he would not confess, but knew of old how inconvenient questions were apt to seal, instead of opening her old friend's lips. At last he asked her to recite him something from one of Plato's Dialogues.

She began, but could not proceed. The familiar words

recalled too much. She sat mute and tearless, with that look into the distance which he dreaded.

Then he forgot all but the desire to soothe her and recall her to the present.

"The multitudes are more restless than ever to-day," he said. "They say He for whom they were looking has come, and has been teaching openly in the midst of the Temple. That He has accused the Jewish Council of seeking to kill Him. Some of the people deny this, and say it is a delusion. But some murmur that it is true."

And again, afterwards, when he came in finally at night, the old man said,—

"He seems to have been right in His apprehensions. Some strange spell seems to lie on rulers and people. The Council *has* sought to take Him. He has no followers to defend Him; no friends, that I can hear of, but a few unarmed Galileans. He does not seem even to seek to reign, or to displace any one who is reigning. Why, then, should the rulers of His people dread and hate Him? Or why, if they hate Him, can they not silence Him?"

"Laon," said the Roman girl, "can not *we* hear Him? I would give worlds to listen to Him."

"He speaks in the Temple," Laon said. "No Gentile may enter there. To-day some of the people are enraged against Him, because He said He would be with them but for a little while longer, and would go whither they

could not come. They think He meant He would go and teach the Gentiles."

"The Gentiles? Ourselves!" Clœlia exclaimed, starting up, her whole face brightening. "Can this be possible?"

"I know not. What can it matter?" said Laon, scornfully. "Would you leave Socrates and Plato for this Galilean?"

"I never heard Socrates or Plato," she said, sadly. "If they were living, and I could ask them anything, it might be different. But they always seem to stop just when I most want to know more."

"Impatient heart of woman!" Laon exclaimed. "I thought my Diodora had been wiser, and would be content to poise herself patiently on probabilities and wait. I thought there was one woman above the vulgar cravings of religion, able to live on truth!"

The next evening Laon came home apparently relieved.

"At last we may escape from this fanatical city!" he said. "The Feast is over, and my mind at last is at rest about this Galilean. No calm patience of waiting there, no wise contentment with probabilities. No second Socrates is here. No patient seeker after truth, refusing to be called wise, declaring himself only a lover of wisdom, turning his followers from himself to truth.

"Every day of this Feast the festivities have concentrated around two symbols. Every morning, before

breaking fast, they have drawn fresh water from the rocky well in the valley below the Temple, and poured it with a tumult of joy on the altar; in memory, some say, of the thirst of their forefathers having been quenched by water miraculously smitten from a rock in the desert.

“Every evening there has been music and dancing around the four Great Lamps in the Women’s Court of the Temple.

“And to-day they say this Galilean cried aloud in that court of the Temple, ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink!’ proclaiming openly that He Himself is able to satisfy the thirst of every man; and that He Himself is the Light of the world. No resemblance to Socrates there!”

“It was much to promise,” said Clœlia. “For there is much darkness in the world, and much thirst in the hearts of men. Have they silenced Him?”

“Silenced Him! No!” said the old man impatiently. “The people are infatuated. The debates and divisions among them run higher than ever. At last their rulers sent armed officers into the Temple to take Him as He taught. It does not seem that either He or any one offered any resistance. But the armed men stood paralyzed, they say, before Him, listening—listening like all the rest. I did not hear that He professed to startle them by any wonder-working. There is a great rumour of His miracles. But just then there was nothing of the kind. Nothing but words. They say He speaks with

authority, and not as their scribes. The armed men went back to the magistrates without their prisoner. And all they could say in their defence was, that 'never man spake like this Man.' A fanatical people! A people of dangerous enthusiasms! And fanaticism is infectious," said Laon impatiently. "I will not stay another day in the place. The Feast is over. People can attend to ordinary affairs again. To-morrow we start for Tiberias and Antioch."

"Laon!" Clœlia exclaimed, "let me stay here. I would give the world to hear that voice. I am only a poor impatient woman, and long for one word—only one word—from some one who could speak with authority."

But Laon was immovable.

"If there were any truth in this," he said at last, "they would hear more of it, and she might come again. And, meantime, nothing should induce him to expose her to any of these detestable Oriental superstitions. Had not the Jews and Egyptians been long since banished from Rome for the best reasons? Moreover, this Galilean, it was said, only taught Jews, only healed Jews. What was the use of lingering outside the walls of that Temple, just to hear Jewish rumours of what was said and done inside? Perhaps it might prove true that He intended to go to the Gentiles to teach the Gentiles. In that case, she was more likely to hear him at Antioch than at Jerusalem."

Still she pleaded to be suffered to stay, till at last Laon

had recourse to an argument strong from his lips, because he was too generous to use it without reluctance. He reminded her of the life he had rescued, of the long toil he had gone through for her; and, lastly, how her dying sister had given her as a last charge to do what she could for him.

Duty, as she interpreted it, prevailed with the Roman maiden; and the next day Laon, Clœlia, and Siguna went northward to Antioch, hoping in their way to see Hilda and Callias at Tiberias.

But all the way the feeling grew stronger and stronger in Diodora's heart that she was flying from the only voice in the world that could tell her of her dead, or bring one drop of living water to her parched heart.

Up and down the rocky hills of Judæa, as they rode in silence one after another along the stony paths, by every village fountain, through every starry night, those words rang in her heart,—“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink;” and, “I am the Light of the world.”

“Of the *world!*” she thought; “that is more than Judæa and Galilee. Perhaps more than this world—than all the visible world together.”

Memories of healing and of teaching lingered around many a city and village through which they passed. Not through Judæa and Galilee only, but through Samaria, sacred footsteps had been before them.

One Samaritan, at least, was walking with healthy

limbs among those hills, who had knelt there once a suppliant leper,—and once again a grateful healed man at the feet of the Healer.

One Samaritan woman, at least, could not have forgotten the voice of Him who had known all the sin of her life, and satisfied all the thirst of her heart.

In one city of Samaria, at least, after two days of those marvellous words, confirmed, as far as we know, by no miracle, the Galilean had been welcomed as "the Christ, the Saviour," not of the Jews only, "but of the world."

But Laon would not linger. He hurried on as if he felt there were enchantment in the air, and his child might be fascinated away from him against her will and his.

Around the shores of Galilee they delayed longer. Laon hoped to have found Callias the Greek sculptor. He had been there not long before, and was expected again. So at Tiberias they stayed some days.

And there again the traces of that Life could not be hidden.

Not among Rabbis or rulers, or only among men, had those years of teaching and healing penetrated.

Everywhere, in village and city, might be found traces of His presence.

Women were there who had brought their babes to Him to be blessed ; little children that had felt His arms folded around them, and had been conscious of the love, if they could not comprehend the blessing. In every

ferring his army into Jerusalem, and venturing to insult their religion as no previous governor had done, by introducing the "idolatrous" standards into the Holy City, had taught them the lesson by which they afterwards so fatally profited, that to a sufficiently determined resistance he would yield any conviction of his own.

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of a poor desolate Gentile woman like herself getting near enough to the outskirts of the listening crowd to catch some fragments of those words which seemed so marvelously to disarm those who hated, and to satisfy the inmost hearts of those who loved.

Three sayings lived and grew in her heart.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

"I am the Light of the world."

And, dearer to her than all,—

"She is not dead, but sleepeth."

At last a voice which spoke with certainty, as One who knew ; with authority, as One who had a right to teach and to command !

That Voice she had set her heart to hear, or die ; or, better still, she thought, to hear and die.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE national gatherings of the Jews, when the nation was dispersed, as it had been since the conquests of Alexander, secured a rapid circulation of information most advantageous to those who enjoyed it, in days when posts and letters were never dreamed of, except as the peculiar privileges of the wealthy or of those in office.

Anything likely to affect the destinies of the people spread swiftly from the centre to the remotest point on circumference.

The Romans knew well how, crossing, and using the straight lines of their roads, and subtly intertwined in the visible system of their Empire with its focus at Rome, was ever living and working this Jewish community—active, restless, pliant, indestructible, with its focus at Jerusalem.

But Rome was merely one out of many centres of the Empire but an incident in the history of the Jews. Jerusalem was the City of God, the centre of

the world. Thence, according to the Roman interpretation of the Jewish national Hope, were to come the "mighty ones who were to be the Sovereigns of the world."

Yet among the Jews themselves, as we know, the differences in belief were very wide. United by a common patriotism, their belief had a latitude wider than could be claimed for the freest community, whose bond was entirely spiritual, and not ancestral.

The debated questions of the Synagogue were the immortality, or the resurrection of man, future retribution in any form, the existence of any spiritual creatures besides man, the authenticity or Divine authority of three-fourths of the Jewish Scriptures ; questions which, it would seem to us, left very little common ground for those who differed about them, and very little religion of any kind for those who held the negative side.

And, besides these differences which convulsed the Jewish communities in Palestine, there were the deep, though less obvious dissimilarities between the Hellenists and the Hebrews, colouring the whole view of life present and future, of the Sacred Books, and of the Hope of the Messiah.

The Alexandrian and the Galilean beliefs as to the promised Deliverer, the Deliverance He was to effect, the Kingdom He was to establish, were probably in some respects further apart than Plato and Moses.

Yet the great national Bond remained, that great

national Hope which turned the gaze of the people on the future, and not only on the past.

It seems unquestionable that, in the days of Tiberius Cæsar, the whole Jewish nation, with all its differences of culture, of interest, and of belief, was restlessly surging and heaving to and fro with that one passionate expectation of a Deliverer close at hand, such as has never stirred that nation, or any other nation, before or since.

* * * * *

When Laon, Siguna, and Clœlia Diodora reached Antioch, they found the little group through which alone they, as Gentiles, had any insight into the Jewish world, already full of agitation, in consequence of rumours that had reached them from Palestine.

Here, also, as in every place where that Name reached, "there was a division among the people concerning Him."

Onias and Esther had heard, two or three years before, of one like an ancient prophet, living apart from common humanity, like one of the former judges or seers—dwelling in the wilderness, yet gathering throngs from the cities; in the garb of the great mysterious prophet who had been rapt from earth in a chariot of fire; with the lightnings of his brief burning sermons kindling the consciences of the wicked and profane to repentance and reformation, yet reserving his severest denunciations for the professedly religious; scourging the publicans with whips, and the Pharisees with scorpions.

Such a mighty man, Onias thought, might well be "He who was to come."

When he had purified to himself a band of followers sufficiently devoted, he might raise the standard of Israel on the hills beyond Jordan, sweep a passage through the river like Elijah, enter the land like Joshua, while the Romans, like the Canaanites of old, would flee before him, or remain to crouch under his yoke.

For to Onias, as to the Roman courtier of Augustus, the ideal of universal empire was the enthronement of his own people as conquerors on Olympus, whilst the rest of the world crouched bound below.

"O Lord, thou madest the world for our sakes," said the Book of Esdras. "As for the other people which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, but be like unto spittle."

But soon came the bewildering tidings that this stern denouncer of sin absolutely disclaimed all power and all leadership for himself; founded no school; attempted no gathering of the nation; replied to the authorities sent from Jerusalem formally to investigate his credentials, by a series of disappointing negations; declared he was not the Messiah, not Elijah, not the Prophet—indeed, well-nigh disclaimed all personality. Not as a Prophet, a Rabbi, a Leader, not as a man at all would he be recognized; merely as "a *Voice!*" "a Voice in the wilderness," smiting rocks, opening fountains of tears,

and then dying away as a voice dies, the most characteristic thing about a man, leaving the mightiest effects of any human thing; but of itself leaving nothing, not a trace, not an echo, dying absolutely, never to be recalled,—by no subtle chemistry, by no passionate yearning of affection, ever to be re-awakened from the air on which it has ceased to vibrate.

A Voice heralding the King.

And then at intervals came rumour of Him so heralded.

Perplexing rumours again. Perplexing even (we are told) to the Forerunner himself when, in the darkness of his prison, only rumours reached him of the outer world.

If “Art thou He who should come, or do we look for another?” was wrung from that faithful heart, what must have been the perplexity of those who looked for a kingdom that was to come with much “observation,” and a King who would compel Tiberius Cæsar to lick the dust before him,—who might make a triumphal entry into Jerusalem with kings holding his bridle rein, and a body-guard of Jews of pure Hebrew blood, whom he might “make princes in all lands”?

The King’s herald in the dungeons of Herod Antipas, and the King taking no heed; the loyal herald murdered in the prison, to gratify the vengeance of a wicked princess, and still the Mightier than all, whom that faithful Voice had so loyally proclaimed, not even threatening vengeance on the murderer!

Content to declare the sufferer “the greatest born of

women." Yet steadfastly proclaiming that the kingdom was no longer only "at hand," but already among them, that the least "within it" were greater than this greatest who had prepared it.

Then came fragments of parables, and of sermons; and benedictions on the poor, the sorrowful, the patient, the persecuted, the hungry and thirsty of this world; difficult elements out of which to found a kingdom such as the Pharisees could conceive worthy of the descendants of those who had fought under the Maccabees.

To Esther, and any like her, gentle and bereaved, stricken with that sense of sin which the old law could plough so terribly deep, brought up in the hope of a higher Deliverer from a deeper ruin, those words brought some glimpses of their true meaning. But they came to her only in broken strains, from outside. And of the inward interpretation to those who cared for them enough to become "disciples," nothing had yet reached Antioch.

Gladly would Onias have persuaded himself that the whole was a mere delusion of the Galilean peasantry.

"Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

"Had any of the rulers believed on Him?"

"Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

The letter of the Sacred Books then, as always, could be forged into weapons against the spirit by those from whom the spirit was gone.

Esther could at any time be baffled in an argument, by texts about Bethlehem, and the princely line of David;

yet, irrefragable as these textual arguments might seem, Onias could not overcome the uneasiness which the repeated reports of miracles caused him.

Thousands fed in the wilderness, the sick of whole districts healed, even (it was said) the dead raised ; it might be perilous altogether to disregard signs like these !

Yet these very miracles irritated him as much as anything.

If such power was possessed, why not use it to some practical purpose ?

If the towers of Herod Antipas's Golden House in Tiberias had been levelled like the walls of Jericho, and from the unroofed dungeons the Baptist had been set free ; if the Roman eagles at Cæsarea had been smitten with lightning ; or, better still, the Roman legions laid low like Sennacherib's army ; if the Temple at Jerusalem had been illumined with some great visible glory, or the sacrifices consumed with fire from heaven ;—this would indeed have been something to compel attention ; this would have been “ a sign from heaven.” But these quiet, unostentatious little acts of healing and feeding,—why waste such power as they seemed to indicate on work so unimpressive ? At least, if multitudes could be thus miraculously fed,—instead of feeding a few thousand hungry Galilean men and women on common bread and fish, why not have entertained the whole nation gathered at one of the national festivals at Jerusalem—with something like the fare of a king's table ? Or, at the very

least, why not exonerate the fishermen, His followers, from the necessity of pursuing their humble craft, and prepare them for being chiefs of the new kingdom by releasing them from servile toil?

If, indeed, the sick could be healed, let them, at all events, be sick people of distinction. There was disease in palaces as well as in poor men's homes. Let some great city wailing round a dead prince, like Antioch around the funeral pyre of Germanicus, or Rome around the urn which bore his ashes, be startled into joy and rapturous faith by having its dead given back to it; not merely some poor, desolate Syrian home be made glad for a few years by the restoring of a dead son to a widowed mother.

But concerning this Esther was altogether of another mind. She thought this pity for the poor and unnoticed Divine;—*Divine!* which was more than kingly; yet most truly kingly, because Divine. These works were like the Scriptures of their people, she said; like the angel appearing to show the well to Hagar the slave; like the widow's cruse at Sarepta, which was always only a cruse, yet never failed.

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evidently, from all accounts, an inexplicable power about the presence of this Nazarene not rashly to be encountered."

He—Onias—it could no longer be concealed, was a man of substance. It was, therefore, of some importance to any cause which side he took with regard to it. Men of influence must act with caution. So much substance was not to be risked with levity.

"It might be of *infinite* importance to *themselves* which side they took!" Esther would suggest on the other hand. "If he risked money by taking one side, might they not be risking *themselves* by taking none?"

But Onias persisted in waiting for the "sign from heaven." When such a sign as he could not question came from such a visible heaven as he recognized, it would be time to think of launching such a heavily-freighted vessel as his. Till then, he would keep safe in the harbour.

It was into debates such as these that the tidings came which Diodora brought from Jerusalem, increasing considerably the perplexities of Onias, the double-minded, and as greatly relieving those of Esther, the single-hearted.





CHAPTER XXIX.

IN the Roman maiden the Jewish mother found, at last, a heart stricken out of this world's hopes, like her own, thirsting for all her religion could give ; thirsting, like herself, for all it promised and could not give.

Little Hilda had owed all to Esther. The deep sense of sin and want which the Jewish rites and records could awaken, had vibrated from her heart to the child's. But the vibrations, though genuine, were faint ; such as one string awakens in another, rather than as from two instruments touched by the same mighty hand. And now in Hilda's home, full of hope and affection, and of the prattle of little children, with the heart of her husband trusting securely in her, the ideal of Hebrew family life seemed fulfilled. The sense of sin weighed lightly where the hand of Him who forgives the penitent, but does not clear the guilty, seemed to be shown in such manifest tokens of His loving-kindness. And it might be borne with, that the next life should seem a little dim, when so wide and bright a space lay between.

With Siguna, Esther well knew, that steadfast hope which never died in her heart of meeting Olave once more, was dearer to her than even to Hilda her rich fulfilments of hope. She did not wish to think of a life hereafter while she believed one world, one life, still held her husband and herself.

To Siward also, from other causes, the world looked wide and solid enough. If Hilda was absorbed in its brightness, Siward was equally absorbed by its wrongs. To the great national Jewish Hope of a Deliverer, as Esther interpreted it, he was always willing to listen. The rumours from Galilee had awakened, at intervals, a keen interest in his mind. Those promises to the poor and the wronged, those miracles of healing, seemed to him just what the world wanted. Only he watched to see whether the benediction and the healing would extend further than Galilee, further than the Jewish nation, further than the Roman Empire.

What he longed for was not so much forgiveness of sin, as redress of wrongs ; not so much " life, and immortality brought to light," as life made worth living here and now.

With Clœlia Diodora it was different.

To her, as to Esther, the life beyond, or rather the life within, had become the reality, and all else the shadow ; too exclusively, no doubt, a reality apart from all else, instead of inspiring it.

What her Beloved had lost, she passionately chose to

contemn as no loss. She would not believe that what was lavished recklessly on the common crowds of men, or on brutes and insects—nay, even on men worse than brutes—and had been torn from that pure and beautiful being, was worth anything. This world was a shadow, a chaos; this flesh a prison, a tomb. At least so she said to herself. The terrible uncertainty was whether, worthless as it was, it might not yet be *all*.

For one clear, certain word from that unknown shore, she would have dared, she had dared, all the terrors and pains of the world visible and invisible.

For this she searched the Jewish Scriptures; not calmly investigating them as a magazine of countless treasures, but passionately ransacking them as only one other heap of crumbling dust for her unless she could find this one lost jewel there; but if she found that, the casket of the pearl which was worth the world.

“To teach Greek to your sons,” said some of the severer Oriental rabbis, “was as profane as to keep swine. The Law should be studied day and night. Greek should be studied at that hour when it is neither day nor night. Greek,” they added, “was only fit for women;” a mere effeminate decoration, like the cringing-pins, the glasses, and the spangled ornaments.

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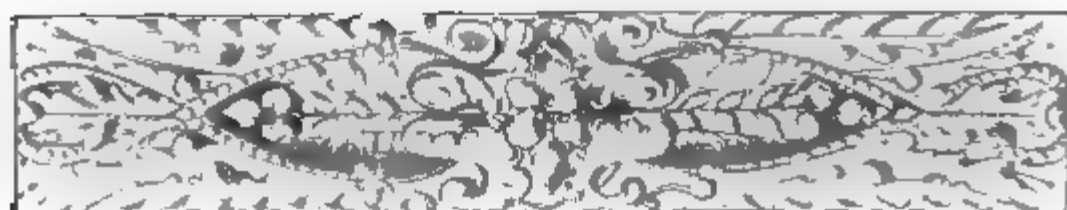
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Laón had solemnly promised Clœlia that, if her desire continued, some one should take her back through Galilee to Jerusalem early that spring, to hear, if possible, that Voice for herself. Meantime she spent all the time that could be spared with Esther. Together they searched those sacred books which have been seed to the sower and bread to the eater of countless generations; Esther, with the devout reverence of early faith quickened by a new hope; Diodora, with the passionate hunger whose one plea is starvation—but both for bread.

Lovely touching stories of human homes—poetical delight in the beauty and sublimity of this visible creation—what were these then to the Roman maiden? The story of her life had closed, with its one great love; the beauty of this visible world, now that the beautiful eyes she loved had closed on it, jarred on her like an instrument that can only play one tune when the words have changed from a triumph to a wail.

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Yet ever and anon, through the long wail, came faint echoing murmurs of that mighty far-off music. They reached her not as something painfully wrought out from the depths within, but as something quietly listened to from above.

“Thy dead shall rise.”

And in the later prophets,—

“They that sleep in the dust shall awake.”

And in the earlier words, which seemed to her to reach further than any,—

“As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”

“*Waking*,” being “*satisfied*” with the sight of the face of God, being satisfied by being made like Him. If this was what lay beyond their brief and broken years, this was indeed an immortality worth waiting for.

She sat one day pressing her fingers on the precious words ; the roll of manuscript lay stretched across her knees in that little room in Esther’s house where the two women spent so many hours together. It opened on a small inner court. The Syrian sun flickered through pomegranates and trellised vine-leaves, on the floor of the alcove where their cushions were spread. A runlet of cool water was trickling into a little marble basin, and out of it through a stone channel.

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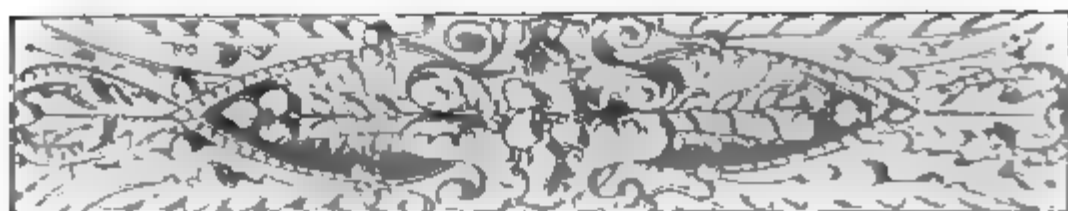
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Clœlia Diodora made no reply. The words sank deep.

“ It is not death that can hide His face from us, but sin ! ” Esther resumed, after a long pause. “ Of this I am sure. And to sleep, even to sleep for ages, with His face shining on our sleep, as a mother’s on a sleeping babe, would be something.”

Clœlia started suddenly, as if she had heard a voice.

“ *The maid is not dead, but sleepeth,* ” she murmured. “ Oh, Esther, I have been dreaming. The Voice that said that, and woke the dead, is still to be heard by the Galilean lake. Why are we poring over old books ? There is a Voice to be heard ! a living Voice, such as these old words were spoken by once ; and yet, if all is true, not such—not such as was ever heard on earth before.”

“ Go,” Esther said ; “ and would to Heaven I might be suffered to go with thee ! ”

But still Laon interposed delay. The very mention of the wish seemed not now to irritate but to pain him.

“ Child,” he said at last, one evening, “ I have promised. If nothing can turn thee from this superstitious longing, thou shalt go. But I will never go myself with thee. I had well-nigh as soon carry thee to the Amphi-

casket of a jewel, Diodora looked up. Above the low roof of the house rose the purple outline of distant hills. In the light of those words she seemed herself to awaken as if from a long, terrible dream, and to see and hear the outside world once more.

“Esther, Esther!” she said. “Are *they* awake *now*?—satisfied now?—seeing that face now? If they are, I am satisfied. To them death is no wrong. The pain and loss are only mine. And that I can bear.”

Esther's eyes sank before the earnest question in Diodora's.

“I know that they shall rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day,” she said, in a tremulous voice.

“But now?—*now*?” was the passionate reply. “If they are robbed of anything like life for anything like sleep, every hour that they are asleep, silent, lost in the night,—every hour that *she* is asleep, my beautiful, and good, and tender, and true, the delight of every eye that saw her, whilst I—I—am awake, is a robbery and a wrong to her; and it is this I cannot bear.”

Esther bowed her head, and tenderly sought to silence the words of revolt, so terrible to her, by pressing the lips that uttered them to her own.

“Child! child! to awake even at last, to wake once and for ever thus, is not that something? You forget God!” she added, in a low voice. “That world, all worlds; their life, our life; they—we—are His. The terrible thing is not death—not even death!” she said

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theatre to be devoured of the wild beasts. Siguna may go with thee, and Siward. Since my voice has lost all power for thee, what service could I render by accompanying thee?"

"Come, Laon, dearer, better to me always than all but one!" she said, laying his hand on her head, as she sat at his feet. "Hast thou no yearning for more certain words? Come thou thyself, and hear and see."

"I am content to live as I have lived," he said; "to die as Socrates died, if I may. I am too old to hunt the world for new voices."

"Would thy Socrates have been content?" she ventured to ask. "Would he not have gladly left the 'cavern' and 'the shadows of the outside fire,' for the sunlight and the realities?" she added, quoting a part of the Republic they had often read together. "O Laon," she concluded, with an appealing clasp of her hands, "if they are only words like any other words, how can they harm thee? Wilt thou not know them, and guard me, thy child? Come and see. Come and take care of me."

He seemed touched, and a little comforted.

"My poor old arm and my thin old voice could do little for thee," he said. "Siguna shall cherish thee; and Siward has a stout arm to defend thee. I will stay at home, and work for you all. And if," he added, after a pause, "there could be anything in the words you seek to hear, they will not come weakened to me, child, through thy voice."

So at last Laon suffered the preparations for the journey to Galilee to begin; and the day of departure was fixed—a fortnight thence.

Slowly the final days of expectation passed for Diodora. The nearer the fulfilment of her longing drew, the more she felt what it might be to her. All the more because those words of Esther had ploughed a deep furrow in her heart: “It is not death that hides God’s face from us, but sin.” Again and again she searched those Sacred Books; not now only to find out what they said of immortality, but what they meant by God and by sin. And with this new object in her search, she felt like some one who has suddenly found the magic word, the master-key, which opens door after door in some vast palace, and casket after casket in some inexhaustible treasury. To these words every barrier of those Sacred Books sprang open; *God*, and *sin*.

This master-key which opened the Scriptures, opened also one chamber after another in the world and in her own life. At last the struggles in her heart were named by such names as could only be given by One who understood: “*It is not death that hides His face from us, but sin.*”

She recalled the bitter dread which she had felt even in the solitude of the Pomœrium—that even that abyss into which she had sunk might be but the brink of a deeper possible abyss: the dread of growing wicked, cruel, malignant, like a cruel phantom of the night, in this endless, hopeless night.



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Divine, and yet to this lowliest dust of the world. Man and woman created, to help, and love, and complete each other ; not to rival or to tyrannize over each other.

Man created able to speak to God ; God speaking to man.

Then the discord.

Man choosing to be as gods, instead of to be like God, and with God ; and losing God and the likeness to Him together ; choosing to be the centre of the universe, and by that choice becoming a mere atom in the midst of a chaos ; falling and dying inwardly with the loss of God. Love changing into selfish passion ; aspiration into ambition.

Still, God seeking, speaking ; pronouncing the sentence, yet promising, recalling ; closing the spoiled Paradise, yet opening a Tabernacle in the wilderness, a Temple and Holy Place among the thorns and thistles. The chasm between the sinful creature and the Holy One recognized, guarded ; hollowed deeper and deeper through the centuries, by man's sin, by deeper revealings of the Divine holiness ; yet always, on the other side of that chasm, infinite pity.

A sacrifice required of man : sacrifice perpetual, sacrifice of the very costliest and dearest ; yet awful irony cast on whole hecatombs of heartless offerings. Only the heart—only justice, mercy, and walking humbly with God—demanded. Only the heart ; which is, absolutely the whole man.

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So that fortnight passed in the early spring at Antioch, until the day came when the German mother and son and the Roman maiden were to return to Galilee.



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She recalled the bitter dread which she had felt even in the solitude of the Pomœrium—that even that abyss into which she had sunk might be but the brink of a deeper possible abyss: the dread of growing wicked, cruel, malignant, like a cruel phantom of the night, in this endless, hopeless night.

casket of a jewel, Diodora looked up. Above the low roof of the house rose the purple outline of distant hills. In the light of those words she seemed herself to awaken as if from a long, terrible dream, and to see and hear the outside world once more.

"Esther, Esther!" she said. "Are *they* awake *now*?—satisfied now?—seeing that face now? If they are, I am satisfied. To them death is no wrong. The pain and loss are only mine. And that I can bear."

Esther's eyes sank before the earnest question in Diodora's.

"I know that they shall rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day," she said, in a tremulous voice.

"But now?—*now*?" was the passionate reply. "If they are robbed of anything like life for anything like sleep, every hour that they are asleep, silent, lost in the night,—every hour that *she* is asleep, my beautiful, and good, and tender, and true, the delight of every eye that saw her, whilst I—I—am awake, is a robbery and a wrong to her; and it is this I cannot bear."

Esther bowed her head, and tenderly sought to silence the words of revolt, so terrible to her, by pressing the lips that uttered them to her own.

"Child! child! to awake even at last, to wake once and for ever thus, is not that something? You forget God!" she added, in a low voice. "That world, all worlds; their life, our life; they—we—are His. The terrible thing is not death—not even death!" she said

Divine, and yet to this lowliest dust of the world. Man and woman created, to help, and love, and complete each other ; not to rival or to tyrannize over each other.

Man created able to speak to God ; God speaking to man.

Then the discord.

Man choosing to be as gods, instead of to be like God, and with God ; and losing God and the likeness to Him together ; choosing to be the centre of the universe, and by that choice becoming a mere atom in the midst of a chaos ; falling and dying inwardly with the loss of God. Love changing into selfish passion ; aspiration into ambition.

Still, God seeking, speaking ; pronouncing the sentence, yet promising, recalling ; closing the spoiled Paradise, yet opening a Tabernacle in the wilderness, a Temple and Holy Place among the thorns and thistles. The chasm between the sinful creature and the Holy One recognized, guarded ; hollowed deeper and deeper through the centuries, by man's sin, by deeper revealings of the Divine holiness ; yet always, on the other side of that chasm, infinite pity.

A sacrifice required of man : sacrifice perpetual, sacrifice of the very costliest and dearest ; yet awful irony cast on whole hecatombs of heartless offerings. Only the heart—only justice, mercy, and walking humbly with God—demanded. Only the heart ; which is, absolutely the whole man.

theatre to be devoured of the wild beasts. Siguna may go with thee, and Siward. Since my voice has lost all power for thee, what service could I render by accompanying thee?"

"Come, Laon, dearer, better to me always than all but one!" she said, laying his hand on her head, as she sat at his feet. "Hast thou no yearning for more certain words? Come thou thyself, and hear and see."

"I am content to live as I have lived," he said; "to die as Socrates died, if I may. I am too old to hunt the world for new voices."

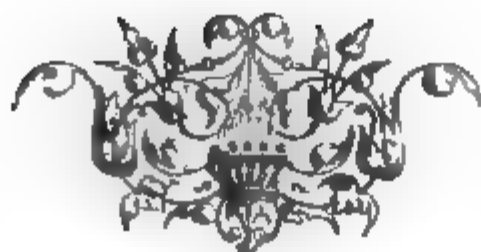
"Would thy Socrates have been content?" she ventured to ask. "Would he not have gladly left the 'cavern' and 'the shadows of the outside fire,' for the sunlight and the realities?" she added, quoting a part of the Republic they had often read together. "O Laon," she concluded, with an appealing clasp of her hands, "if they are only words like any other words, how can they harm thee? Wilt thou not know them, and guard me, thy child? Come and see. Come and take care of me."

He seemed touched, and a little comforted.

"My poor old arm and my thin old voice could do little for thee," he said. "Siguna shall cherish thee; and Siward has a stout arm to defend thee. I will stay at home, and work for you all. And if," he added, after a pause, "there could be anything in the words you seek to hear, they will not come weakened to me, child, through thy voice."

the Sower, the Son of man, was being traced in her heart.

So that fortnight passed in the early spring at Antioch, until the day came when the German mother and son and the Roman maiden were to return to Galilee.



Conscience after conscience smitten with agony of repentance, heart after heart touched with longing affection ; yet through all the agonies a dim trust in Divine forgiveness—through all the adoring love, dim, half-dumb moanings of distance and separation.

And through all the darkness, distance, separation, always the music of a far-off hope, growing ever nearer and clearer : the hope of a Conqueror to be born of that poor, fallen Eve—of a Son of Abraham, in whom the world was to be blessed—of a King, a Shepherd, a Priest, a Sufferer, a Deliverer. A Deliverer from wrong, from oppression, from sin, from this chasm which rent the world from God : the Sent of God—the Son of man.

So the two women—the Roman and the Jewess—searched, and listened, and longed, and wondered, and learned. And all their listening and learning were living with the breath of prayer and the pulse of new hope—the hope of hearing that Voice in Galilee. For dimly Diodora began to feel that whatever could bridge that chasm between man and God—whatever could resolve the discord of *sin*—might bridge all chasms and all separations, and bring all discords to music. In finding One who could forgive and cleanse her sin, she would find One who could conquer death. Since not death separates us from God, but sin, not death, she began to feel, but only sin, can really separate us from our beloved. The long furrow which through the centuries the history of the Jewish race had been ploughing for the seed of

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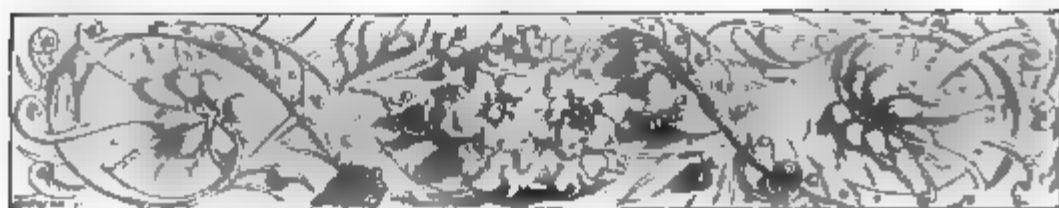
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folded themselves in all the joy and beauty, as in their mother's robe.

And as Callias, the young sculptor, watched and guarded them, a whole spring-tide of delight and beauty seemed to blossom also within him ; and an immortality of youth seemed necessary, if only to shape into perfection the germs of that world of lovely visions ; nay, more, an immortality seemed promised, seemed actually infolded in such an undeveloped inner wealth of art, as the creation is infolded in the chaos.

To old Laon also the spring brought its gladness. A pulse of life seemed to throb even through the glorious old world in which he lived. The heroes and wise men of old seemed no more merely the forerunners, but the fathers of the world. The present seemed once more not the old age of the past, but its child. And in this fresh green world, among these forests and rivers, vigorous and beautiful as any Homer or Plato had ever seen, it seemed not so impossible that voices as true and sweet might yet be heard, that lives as high and true and joyous as those of old might yet be lived.

Only to Onias the spring brought nothing new. He indeed dwelt in the under-world, the caverns of the gnomes and metal-workers, roofed in from the sunlight by domes of silver and gold, and lighted only by the smelting furnaces where the precious ores are fused. No breath of spring penetrated there. The very purpose of the dwellers was to secure those dwellings from change ;



CHAPTER XXX.

THE spring had come to those wooded hills of Antioch, green all the year round with the glossy leaves of ilex, bay, and myrtle, bringing even to the well-watered Paradieses of Epidaphne a new freshness on tree and grass, and among the grasses a glorious wealth of colour in the countless tints of countless flowers.

Every tree must flower in its own climate ; and at Antioch everything seemed to be in its own climate. Every fragrant thicket became a home of birds. Everywhere fell soft cooings of doves, or bubbled up joyous fountains of song ; all the hill-sides broke into a flood of blossom and of music ; and everywhere among that forest of blossom prattled and played the children, and the little brooks—the children of the mountains.

Every day Hilda's fair children found some new treasure poured out for them on the lap of the beautiful new world. The earth seemed to the children kind and smiling, like their own fair young mother ; and they nestled among the flowers, and hid among the thickets, and

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The chain was around him and his no more, and before him rose no more the shame and the slow anguish of the Cross.

So, exchanging few words, but full of many hopes, the German mother and son, and the Roman patrician maiden, went their way southward from Antioch towards Galilee.

Everywhere, the vineyards on the terraced slopes, the corn-fields in the valleys and plains, the forests on the heights, were green with the new life of spring. In the fragrant forest glades of Galilee the hoofs of the asses which the women rode swept through thick beds of flowers, scarlet and purple and golden.

And as they approached the shores of Tiberias, in every village street, and among every band of labourers among which they passed, the pulse of the new Hope for the world was throbbing. Multitudes were looking for a Deliverer from the yoke of Rome. In every village were some who had felt the touch of those healing hands, or heard the tones of that liberating voice, freeing their beloved from hopeless disease, and themselves from sorrow worse than death.

On every hill-side the tones of that Voice had sounded ; and fragments of the life-giving words must have been

to roof in their world from God, from His storms, His rusting rains and winds, from the perilous transmutations of His light; unconscious that they could only secure their world from change by sealing it against life.

Into this under-world, with its heaps of treasure and its vain bolts of carefulness, no living breath reached from the earth outside, or from the spring-tide of the Better Hope. Blossoms had no appreciable value there unless they could be crushed and distilled into changeless oils of perfume; nor fruits until they were dried and preserved beyond possibility of decay, or of reproduction.

Spiritual truth, likewise, could only be admitted there with the perilous life crushed out of it, dried into the immutable letter, warranted to keep for centuries without diminution or growth (if sealed from the air and light).

But to Esther and Clœlia Diodora, and in a measure to Siward, that spring brought anew a hope to which all the wealth of new life flooding the hills and plains around Antioch seemed but as a little sea-side pool left high among the rocks, witnessing that beyond is the Great Sea of life, promising that at the next tide the Great Sea will be sweeping, surging, boundless, fathomless there.

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To the German mother came tender histories of little children folded to the heart of the Son of man, blessed by the touch of His hands and the words from His lips ; of fainting multitudes fed, of blind eyes opened, and deaf ears unstopped ; of palsied and crippled limbs made strong and free.

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And so, with hearts throbbing with ever stronger pulsations of that great Hope, they pressed up the hills from the fertile hollows of the lake of Galilee, on

and on towards the city where that Voice was said to be teaching and those Hands were believed to be healing still ; towards Jerusalem, if haply they might catch some faint tones of the mighty words, or but touch the hem of the garment, or gather up some scattered crumbs of the benedictions, or even catch the gleam of the lightnings of the eyes which saw through all disguises to the sin, yet pierced to the sin only to consume it, and save the sinner ; if haply, at last, His hour being come, they might even echo back the Hosannas in which His people proclaimed Him King, content for ever to be hewers of wood and drawers of water in the kingdom of Him who came to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free.

Until, at last, on one quiet hill-side, the last before they would have reached Olivet, they met a little down-cast company of Galileans, and heard that He who they trusted should have redeemed Israel—who had fed the thousands, stilled the storm, raised the dead—had at length been seized by the Sanhedrim, condemned by the Romans, nailed to the shameful Cross between two notorious criminals, and there, after six hours of torture, had died.

Unresisting, uncomplaining, and unavenged, He had died, and had been buried.



CHAPTER XXXI

SLOWLY the three retraced their steps to Antioch. The beauty of the spring was still in all its freshness on the green hills and corn-fields, the orchards, and fragrant gardens of those smiling Galilean shores, which seemed to those who looked on them as "the Paradise of God."

The little waves of the lake rippled with a low cool music on the sandy beach, or among the roots of the oleanders. The sails of the fishing-boats speckled the blue waters; the little fleets returned each to its own rocky promontory or mimic harbour, to be welcomed, with their haul of fish, in town or village, by mothers and children. Along the plain of Gennesaret the sower went forth to sow, followed along the stony way-side by the hungry flocks of birds; far up on the slopes of the higher hills the shepherds might be seen leading their mingled flocks—the white sheep clustered near them, the nimble black goats scattered hither and thither among the steep rocks. In the village streets the carpenter was busy with his plane, the women sat

within the shade grinding at the mill-stone, or again mixing the leaven in the bread now that the Passover was over.

All went on as in any other spring. The ceaseless Parables were being lived and acted over and over, as on those three former springs when the eyes of One not of this world had read them, and had shown how what to earthly eyes seemed but pictures or idle tracteries, were indeed hieroglyphics, sacred signs of a priestly language, never more to be forgotten or lost to men.

But to some hearts on these shores the life and the meaning must have passed out of all the world with those tidings from Jerusalem.

The sick might be laid at the doors to feel the breath of spring ; but nevermore to the end of time would they feel the touch which "healed them all." The death-wail might resound along the streets ; nevermore to the end of time, in cottage or palace, would it be hushed, and changed into the song of joy. The storms might wear themselves out on the tormented waters, and on the shattered and sinking ships ; nevermore to the end of time would the quiet tones of the voice which said, "It is I : be not afraid," calm the trembling hearts of men, and the very winds themselves.

But to those who loved Him, and had learned something not only of what He could do, but of what He was—who had loved Him enough to know Him, and had known Him enough to worship Him—what must have

the land become where he had taught for three years, and would never teach again? What must the world have seemed where it was possible for Him to be sentenced as a malefactor, and executed as the basest criminal or slave?

* * * * *

To Siward all the darkest fears of his old Northern traditional beliefs came back. The whole world seemed indeed to have become the dominion of the evil powers. The powers of life and light (which always, as he had thought in childhood, held a warfare of fearful peril and uncertainty with the powers of death and darkness, and had more than once been vanquished—and vanquished in the best and most beloved—by blind force or cruel stratagem) were most surely vanquished now.

The terrible tidings did not exactly surprise him. It was like so much that he had feared, indeed, or had seen. It was only the returning in a darker shape of the fear and doubt that had hung over all his life; only the quenching of the brightest hope he had ever ventured to receive, as other hopes had been quenched before.

It was no new thing for nations not to recognize or to reject those who would have saved them. The Germans had murdered Herman; the Greeks, Laon said, had poisoned Socrates; the Romans had suffered Germanicus to be slowly poisoned, and went on worshipping Tiberius, who was believed to have been the instigator of the murder.

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for ever fluctuating ; all things save that little island of purity and affection which Hilda kept for him in his home.

Siguna grieved, indeed, and lamented over this fearful crime and wrong. But the world was full of crime, and woe, and wrong. That very year Agrippina, the wife of Germanicus, worn out at last by exile and persecution, and by the wrongs of her sons, had refused to take food, and had died of starvation at Pandataria. Tiberius, amidst the luxuriant beauty of his twelve villas at Capreæ, was congratulating himself that she had saved him the inconvenience of another murder by starving herself to death ; and still the paradises of Capreæ bloomed on unsmitten by any audible curse.

In Laon, on the other hand, for the first time a real interest was enkindled in the Innocent Sufferer. Whilst the reports of the wise and holy words had continued to echo to them from Galilee, he had occupied himself in showing that they were not altogether new, or not altogether true. But now he acknowledged that there was something admirable in the life, and that the death crowned it. It was another martyrdom for truth. The Jews, like the Athenians, had rejected their best and wisest. It was but natural. Socrates and Plato had, as it were, foreseen it. The Jews, deeming their Just One unjust, had suffered Him to be "tortured, fettered, and even crucified." And thenceforth he listened to such fragments as reached him of the gracious words, without

endeavouring to prove that they were valueless, or that some one else had said just the same before.

To Onias the tidings brought some pain, yet more relief. At length the Sanhedrim and the Romans—and therefore, it was to be supposed, Providence, the Unnameable—had settled the doubt which had perplexed him. He confessed he should scarcely have seen his way to such a sentence. But herein lay the comfort of having scribes to interpret and governors to decide for you. The responsibility fell on them. He was thankful he had not been in Jerusalem, or even in Galilee, at the time. Many of the signs and wonders had seemed overwhelming. The teaching (with the exception, perhaps, of the vehement denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees) had seemed worthy of the prophets. And, he confessed, many of the ancient prophecies had seemed to be strangely fulfilled; which was, of course, only another proof of the peril of unlearned interpretations of prophecy. The scribes and Pharisees had evidently understood the question from the beginning, as was to be expected of scribes and Pharisees. And the Romans had finally and for ever, however roughly, ended the controversy. He wondered a little that the Sanhedrim had consented to concede so much to the Roman governor. The doom of a Roman slave was scarcely one which should have been suffered to fall on any free-born Jew. But no doubt the rulers estimated the peril better than he could. The whole nation, they probably

saw, was in danger of being led astray. No doubt the Sanhedrim had acted for the best. If it had been of God, it was plain it could never have come to such an end. Failure was the best cure for delusion. And a delusion so popular, perhaps, required a refutation such as all the people could not fail to understand. Nevertheless, he confessed, he did feel thankful that Providence had cast his lot at Antioch, and not at Jerusalem, during the trial. It was a comfort not to have had to decide.

On Esther and on Siward the gloom fell deepest. To Siward it was an extinction of hope in man and God. To Esther it was an extinction of hope for Israel. If not the Messiah, she felt sure that He who had thus suffered at Jerusalem was One who had loved Israel, had loved God, and had loved men as none had ever done before.

Before the Romans no accusation could be brought against Him, but that He had said He was King of the Jews. Before the Sanhedrim no fault could be alleged, but that He said, I am the Son of God.

If neither of these was true—the royal claims, or the divine—yet the wonders of healing were true ; the years of patient ministering to every want of the needy, of holy teaching which none could gainsay. No king of Israel would ever come endowed with more wisdom, and power, and patriotism. No son of man could ever come again—if all she heard was true—with more likeness to God. “long-suffering, full of compassion, forgiving sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty.” If, on the other hand,

both of these assertions for which they had put Him to death were true, what would be the fate of Israel then ?

All her woman's heart and all her Hebrew patriotism were stirred to the depths.

In an agony of pity she would moan and sob for hours. Among the thousands those hands had touched, healing and blessing, were there none to succour or to save ?

And then the pity would be frozen back by a horror of apprehension.

What if, as of old her people had rejected their prophets ; if, as they had scornfully refused Moses, and thrown Jeremiah into the dungeon ; if, as when the Table of the Law was being written by the finger of God on the Mount, under the very echo of the thunder and the shadow of the cloud that hid the lightnings, they had danced round the calf ; if, as when the beautiful Temple was illumined by the Divine Glory, and the sacrifices consumed by the heavenly fires, on the opposite height of Olivet they had worshipped the images of base and cruel idols ;—what if, as they had resisted God so long, now at last they had rejected the Best and the Last, and, in the very sight of the redemption and of the Redeemer, had turned aside to the bondage at once of their own sins and of the Roman yoke !

Day and night the vision of that great crime haunted her, as if on her hands also the ineffaceable blood-stain rested. She made no outward show of woe. Of what avail were sackcloth and ashes ?

If Israel had delivered her Deliverer to Roman mockery and torture, what could remain but a fearful vengeance; another Red Sea, with no pillar of fire, and no Divine Hand to cleave a path through its overwhelming waves—another Sinai, with no supplicating Moses to intercede and shield from its just lightnings.

But from Clœlia Diodora the solemn peace that had come, as they journeyed through Galilee, did not pass away.

She was on the side, not of the Jews or of the Romans, but of the Sufferer, of the Dead.

This world had slain its Best. Israel had rejected her King. Was it so wonderful, or so unendurable?

So much as this poor, blind, visible world had lost, so much the Hades, the unseen, had secured.

Thither had passed all that wisdom and power and goodness.

To be as He was, could be no wrong to her beloved. To be where He was must be joy—and how unutterable! If her beloved could indeed hear that Voice and see that Face she would gladly have died to hear and see, she was content. One day she would also die; she also would hear and see. Meantime she could wait, content, if only the waiting and the dimness were for her and not for her beloved—content if the loss and wrong were only hers—content indeed with the brief waiting and the being satisfied for ever.

Content!—nay, in a rapture of expectation, even now

and always, if only she could be certain, as He they had crucified had been certain, of the goodness of God.

The probability on which Socrates had been content to launch forth into the unknown, had seemed to her, of old, strong enough to die on.

The hope that life so yielded up inspired, seemed strong enough to trust her beloved to, which was infinitely more.

One or two rumours of that day on Calvary, brief and broken, floated to her, which made her hope all but a certainty.

There was a report of a strange darkness at noon, and of an earthquake, and a convulsion of the rocks. This might very probably have been, she thought, but this was not what moved her. To her it mattered little.

The sun which could light the murderers to such a deed, and the earth which could suffer such a burden to be laid on her as that Cross, might well bear anything. He had passed beyond their apathy, or their sympathy.

But two reported sayings rested on her heart.

It was said that a Roman centurion who had seen Him die, had broken through his Roman apathy and his soldierly silence, and had exclaimed that He was "*the Son of God.*"

Such majesty, such divinity had shone through that shame and torture!

And it was said that the last words He had uttered on

that rack of anguish were no complaint, no menace, no cry of agonized entreaty, but calm and clear,—

“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”

If this were true, then all she hoped and longed for was true. And it must be true. For who, in all the world, among the Romans, had ever heard such dying words? Would His enemies among the Jews have invented them? Or, if His friends had dared imagine words to put into His dying lips, would they have abstained from one tone of menace on the murderers—one hint of majesty to be avenged?

Those words were true. She was sure of this. Then, if they were true, all the best she cared to hope for was true; better than all she had dared to desire was true.

To die is to go home

When, as Plato thought, the spirit is liberated by death from its prison—when, as the Jewish catacombs pictured, as an uncaged dove it soars forth into the free air—it soars not bewildered into the infinite heavens. Hands receive it, strong and gentle. The hands of the Father.

The unseen world is the kingdom, the world of God. God is the Father.

Let this world, then, be what it may. It matters not. Let this whole life be a slumber, a dream, or a weary waiting, the whole world a shadow. *There* the spirits of the just are at home; now, at once, for ever; at home with the Father. There they are living now, not waiting to be revived, but *living*; awake now, not fettered in

slumbers, however calm ; not waiting to be awakened after a silence and blank of centuries, but awake as those whom infinite love has welcomed to infinite joy.

Living, awake, at home, satisfied, like God, like what they were made to be ; seeing the face of God, and finding it the face of the Father.





CHAPTER XXXIII.



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The streams which had prattled like joyous children among the fragrant flowery thickets, now plashed and bubbled in the depths of dark foliage with a music which bathed the very heart in delicious coolness. Some blossoms had ripened into fruit, the green of many corn-fields had mellowed into gold.

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Conscience after conscience smitten with agony of repentance, heart after heart touched with longing affection; yet through all the agonies a dim trust in Divine forgiveness—through all the adoring love, dim, half-dumb moanings of distance and separation.

And through all the darkness, distance, separation, always the music of a far-off hope, growing ever nearer and clearer: the hope of a Conqueror to be born of that poor, fallen Eve—of a Son of Abraham, in whom the world was to be blessed—of a King, a Shepherd, a Priest, a Sufferer, a Deliverer. A Deliverer from wrong, from oppression, from sin, from this chasm which rent the world from God: the Sent of God—the Son of man.

So the two women—the Roman and the Jewess—searched, and listened, and longed, and wondered, and learned. And all their listening and learning were living with the breath of prayer and the pulse of new hope—the hope of hearing that Voice in Galilee. For dimly Diodora began to feel that whatever could bridge that chasm between man and God—whatever could resolve the discord of *sin*—might bridge all chasms and all separations, and bring all discords to music. In finding One who could forgive and cleanse her sin, she would find One who could conquer death. Since not death separates us from God, but sin, not death, she began to feel, but only sin, can really separate us from our beloved. The long furrow which through the centuries the history of the Jewish race had been ploughing for the seed of

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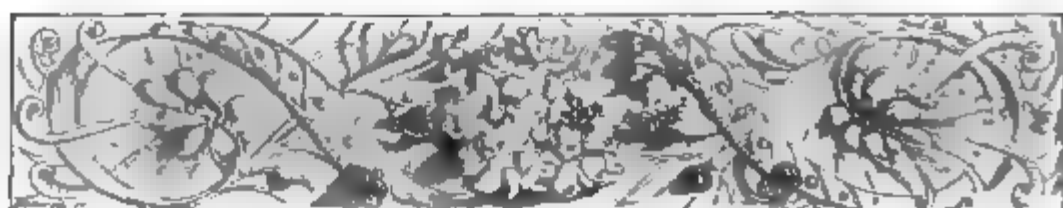
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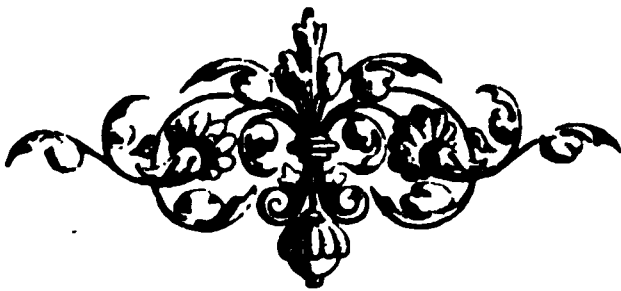
THE spring had come to those wooded hills of Antioch, green all the year round with the glossy leaves of ilex, bay, and myrtle, bringing even to the well-watered Paradises of Epidaphne a new freshness on tree and grass, and among the grasses a glorious wealth of colour in the countless tints of countless flowers.

Every tree must flower in its own climate; and at Antioch everything seemed to be in its own climate. Every fragrant thicket became a home of birds. Everywhere fell soft cooings of doves, or bubbled up joyous fountains of song; all the hill-sides broke into a flood of blossom and of music; and everywhere among that forest of blossom prattled and played the children, and the little brooks—the children of the mountains.

Every day Hilda's fair children found some new treasure poured out for them on the lap of the beautiful new world. The earth seemed to the children kind and smiling, like their own fair young mother; and they nestled among the flowers, and hid among the thickets, and

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watch the tomb. The people who had risen in insurrection, a few years before, at the introduction of any Roman soldiers into Jerusalem, had been possessed with such a desperate fear that the promise of their murdered victim might prove true, that they had waived all Jewish rights and Jewish prejudices, and entreated the Governor for a guard—the very Governor from whom they had wrung the concession not to introduce his troops and their standards into Jerusalem.

The guard so dearly purchased had not succeeded in its purpose.

Roman soldiers had slept at their post, had committed an unpardonable offence against Roman discipline, and had suffered this crime of theirs to be spoken of openly.

In spite of the Roman guard, a few disappointed and broken-hearted Galileans had rescued from the tomb the dishonoured form no dishonour could make less dear to them. From a tomb close to the walls of the city.

What could this mean?

The words of the Sufferer had indeed been mighty, since His unavenged death could leave them still so strong.

Could there be, after all—could there possibly be even yet—a hope? another side to this perplexed rumour? another page in this most mournful history? a hope for those who loved Him yet?

Once more, with that faint glimmer of a hope, tears came to the Jewess, and prayers, and a venturing once

more, though with trembling hands, to open the Sacred Scriptures of her people, which for weeks had been to her as Sinai, as the mount which must not be touched, from which at any time might burst forth the slumbering thunders and the lightnings of most just menace, scorching her heart.

Once more, in the little inner chamber opening on the garden, the two women, Diodora and Esther, sat together searching the ancient books. But this time it was Esther who was longing with trembling passionate longing for some clear message. On Diodora had dawned the hope and the calm.

And as they looked and listened a new world seemed to arise before the Jewess, which she had not seen there before. New forms seemed to start up out of the old pages; dim and shadowy indeed, and dissolving into something else, or into darkness, just when they seemed becoming clearest. Or rather, indeed, it seemed One Form, most majestic and most sorrowful, claiming for Himself a supremacy in sorrow; honoured with an honour above that due to man, yet trampled under foot, a worm and no man; beloved above all by God, yet feeling forsaken by God; bruised by the enemy, yet destroying him; vanquished, yet victorious; always a Promise shining through every promise, a Hope strong beyond every fulfilled hope, a Seed of Abraham still longed for after Isaac was born, a Lawgiver anticipated by the great Lawgiver himself, the Conqueror of a Rest

Joshua never gave, Shepherd to the flocks of God such as David could not be, King with a majesty and a universal dominion such as Solomon never reached. And yet through all the notes of triumph Esther began to hear tones of anguish unutterable, of sorrow which no sorrow could equal, as superhuman as the majesty ; of woe which was no accident, but an essential attribute,—woe borne willingly, yet crushing the Sufferer to the dust ; an agony intertwined with all the victory, as if essential to the victory and the redemption it wrought. Such a strange blending and conflict of power and weakness, of majesty and mockery, of suffering and triumph, that it is said some old interpreters had thought there must be two Messiahs, one to suffer and one to reign. Could it be possible that all these dim and broken foreshadowings met in Him who had raised the dead in Galilee, and died unresisting at Jerusalem ?

Then vain indeed would be the Jewish stratagem and the Gentile guard. No power on earth or in hell could baffle His resurrection.

But if indeed He rose, with what terror on the patient brows, with what lightnings around the despised and tortured form !

The pillar of fire whence of old the God of Israel troubled Pharaoh and his host, as they struggled drowning in the returning waters, would be but a child's terror to the sight of the Face they had mocked, drooping on the cross—the Face of the betrayed King, who might

have been their King, and was now the King of the world, and their Judge.

And He, it seemed, had said He would rise again! His disciples believed it: his enemies feared it.

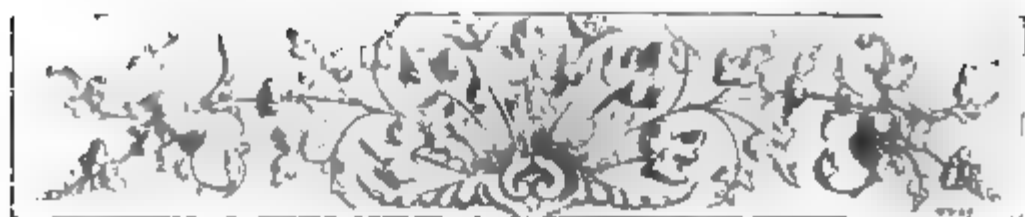
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Meanwhile, as Diodora read, once again the iron entered her soul, ploughing the old furrow. Once more the two pervading presences of those ancient Books took their absorbing place in her heart. Once more the thought of God—holy, infinite, immutable—rose before her in all its majesty; and the thought of sin sank before her in all its depth of degradation.

If, as she felt, the life and death of that beneficent and patient Sufferer made immortality for Him a certainty,—if the chasm between man and God in Him ceased to be,—was there not still an impassable gulf between Him and other men? If, as it seemed, He Himself were without sin, and therefore without separation from God, did not that very sinlessness separate Him as far almost as God Himself from sinful men? If immortality had become more than a probability through His being suffered to die, what was to insure immortality being a going home to God for any but Him?

The race which included Him and His murderers must surely include two very contrary destinies. The same



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shepherds when He was born ; only soaring through the air as easily as He had trodden the sea, hidden from their straining eyes by a simple, ordinary cloud. The Master, as He rose, lifting up His hands, and blessing them, as He had blessed their simple food so often before. Lord of sea, and air, and earth, and heaven, and man. Soaring to His throne on the right hand of God.

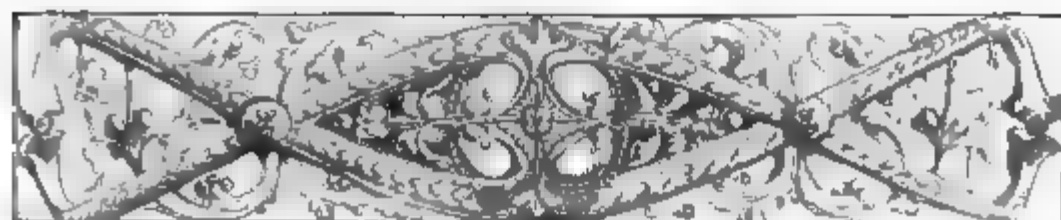
They went back as He had told them, as two of His angels came to remind them. They went back to Jerusalem.

Not in gazing after Him into heaven, not even in living on the memory of His life, were their lives to be spent.

By no slowly-decaying impulse of a Founder was His kingdom launched ; but by the inspiration of a perpetual Presence, and a perpetually renewed life.

They waited in Jerusalem, still the little flock of faithful men and women, until some power came upon them which divested them of all fear, and endowed them with an eloquence which in one day raised their numbers from the hundred and twenty He left, to three thousand.

The Christ had vanished from sight into heaven. But the Church had come into being, and for a time at least shone manifestly, a light and a joy to all around.



CHAPTER XXXV.

THE Church had been born into the world. But as yet she knew not herself; knew not her strength, nor her nature, the glory of her destiny, or the bitterness of the cup she would have to drink; knew only the glory of her Lord, and the bitter cup He had drunk for her.

What every fresh child's life is in the home it brightens, for a brief time the Church was in this worn old world.

The gladness and singleness of heart, the crown and glory of childhood were on her; and she, like her Lord in His childhood at Nazareth, for a time had favour with all the people.

A serene childhood, touching and winning the hearts of men in that weary, faded old world.

It was into no legendary life of innocence and faith that the glory of that fresh life came.

The age of Tiberius Cæsar, of the Rhetoricians, of the Contractors, of the Gladiatorial Games, was no spring-time of the world.

Conscience after conscience smitten with agony of repentance, heart after heart touched with longing affection ; yet through all the agonies a dim trust in Divine forgiveness—through all the adoring love, dim, half-dumb moanings of distance and separation.

And through all the darkness, distance, separation, always the music of a far-off hope, growing ever nearer and clearer : the hope of a Conqueror to be born of that poor, fallen Eve—of a Son of Abraham, in whom the world was to be blessed—of a King, a Shepherd, a Priest, a Sufferer, a Deliverer. A Deliverer from wrong, from oppression, from sin, from this chasm which rent the world from God : the Sent of God—the Son of man.

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But as yet the Church remained at Jerusalem. Elsewhere, there were only a few Jews whose hearts might be stirred with wonder at the things happening at Jerusalem; and a few Gentile proselytes, who might faintly catch the echo, and carry it on.

On the heathen world, as yet, no sign that the Light had indeed dawned for them.

In the Jewish synagogues, no suspicion that any Gentile would ever approach God, except by becoming, as far as possible, a Jew.

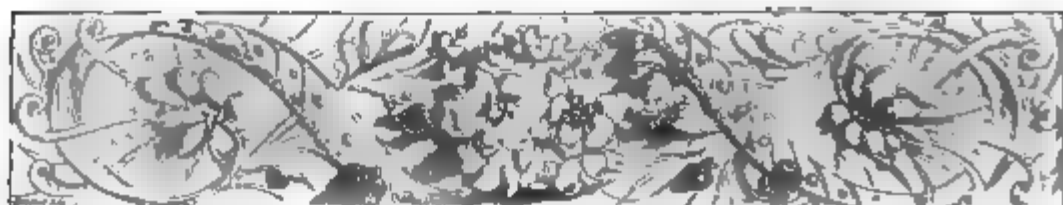
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A great stir and movement agitated the hearts of the little company at Antioch, as in broken fragments the rumours of these things reached them.

Confused murmurs floated hither and thither of miracles of healing, of rapturous speech in many tongues, of a pouring of separate possessions into a common store, all barriers of selfishness swept over by a flood of joy and loyalty.

But above all rose distinct the great fact that this community was founded on the Resurrection.

“It was a strange age,” old Laon said, “for such mystical enthusiasm and child-like overflowings of generosity. A hard, prosaic, unbelieving age. While this golden age of innocence and sunshine, this ideal, Platonic republic—or whatever you liked to term it—was rising into life at Jerusalem, at Capreæ the aged Emperor was vainly trying to extract one drop of new pleasure out of this dry,



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Every tree must flower in its own climate; and at Antioch everything seemed to be in its own climate. Every fragrant thicket became a home of birds. Everywhere fell soft cooings of doves, or bubbled up joyous fountains of song; all the hill-sides broke into a flood of blossom and of music; and everywhere among that forest of blossom prattled and played the children, and the little brooks—the children of the mountains.

Every day Hilda's fair children found some new treasure poured out for them on the lap of the beautiful new world. The earth seemed to the children kind and smiling, like their own fair young mother; and they nestled among the flowers, and hid among the thickets, and

was wrung from the heart of Tiberius,—“What I shall write to you, Conscript Fathers, or what not write, the gods and goddesses make me perish with *a worse destruction than that by which I am perishing every day*, if I know!”

Few contrasts so strong have come so close to each other as that new Song of Eternal Life, and that cynical wail of inward eternal death.

“Force was the only thing,” Laon said, “really believed in, in that hard, smooth, old Roman world,—the force of the Imperial Government on earth; the force of a black magic to wrench, from those who kept them, the secrets of the future and the unseen.”

And in such a world appeared this living, loving, rejoicing community; poor and defenceless, but gloriously liberated from all fear, mightily lifted above all force; built on faith in God, in each other, and in that mighty Master. They appeared not in some remote region of pastoral simplicity, but in the heart of one of the world's great cities—not a holy city, but a city of political intrigue and petty traffic; of bargaining, even with God, about tithes of mint, anise, and cummin; of the driest ceremonialism, and the fiercest partisanship. They aimed at no vestal isolation or supernatural spiritualism. They aimed at being good men and women. They won men and women of every rank and party to join them. And amidst that corrupt society, all who did join them at once partook of this love and faith and joy.

to roof in their world from God, from His storms, His rusting rains and winds, from the perilous transmutations of His light; unconscious that they could only secure their world from change by sealing it against life.

Into this under-world, with its heaps of treasure and its vain bolts of carefulness, no living breath reached from the earth outside, or from the spring-tide of the Better Hope. Blossoms had no appreciable value there unless they could be crushed and distilled into changeless oils of perfume; nor fruits until they were dried and preserved beyond possibility of decay, or of reproduction.

Spiritual truth, likewise, could only be admitted there with the perilous life crushed out of it, dried into the immutable letter, warranted to keep for centuries without diminution or growth (if sealed from the air and light).

But to Esther and Clœlia Diodora, and in a measure to Siward, that spring brought anew a hope to which all the wealth of new life flooding the hills and plains around Antioch seemed but as a little sea-side pool left high among the rocks, witnessing that beyond is the Great Sea of life, promising that at the next tide the Great Sea will be sweeping, surging, boundless, fathomless there.

In Siward's heart, moreover, there was an especial high-tide of joy that year. For the first spring since he was a boy, he was free.

have to be brought face to face with penetrating questions, to which it was impossible to give vague answers—might even yet be harassed by applications to commit himself and his possessions to a community who had shown themselves capable of a fanaticism of all others most fatal to property and the due preservation of social distinctions—the fanaticism of a community of goods.

For, with Esther at his side, he at least would find it impossible to keep these agitating novelties at a distance.

To her, life and death were involved in the truth of this fact of the Resurrection ; the life or death, before all else, of her people Israel.

This, then, was the explanation of that perplexed rumour about the empty sepulchre, and the Roman soldiers slumbering at their post.

The King, the Anointed, the Son of God, rejected of Israel, betrayed by His own people to the Romans, mocked in His dying, actually risen from the dead, living with God ! And yet, not a menace of vengeance on the rebels, His betrayers and murderers !

Nothing but forgiveness, reconciliation, entreaties even, it was said, to all to be reconciled to Him.

The very worst crime possible had been committed. Was nothing lost by it ?

Was Israel indeed, renewed by faith in this ascended King, invisible, but working most mightily still, still to be the centre and source of life to the nations ?

To Siward the Hope was for the world. He looked for One to redress wrongs. With Siguna the thought that lightened many a weary mile was, that she might possibly see those mighty hands laid gently on the bowed and crippled form beside her, and have the joy of beholding the Roman maiden, no more disguised in misshapen flesh, rise strong and free, and seem the good and brave and beautiful being Siguna felt she was.

To Clœlia Diodora no hope of bodily deliverance had ever come. As her sister had loved her, she was content to be. In this world or the next no ideal of life had ever crossed her mind, save to creep, adoring and satisfied, close beside her Beloved, her Beautiful, unnoticed and unknown, serving her, while she served the world.

And now one hope alone inspired her,—the hope of finding some tidings of her dead from One who knew, merging into that deeper hope of being delivered from that which is the death in death—the separation not of body only, but of spirit—that terrible inward death of sin; the hope, dim indeed and fluctuating, but real not only of a Conqueror of Death, but of a Redeemer from sin.

To each of them, as they pressed southward along the shingly beaches of the lake, by its fishing villages, its rocky way-sides, its grassy slopes, its springing corn-fields, came broken fragments of speech, flying reports of acts, such as fed the separate hope of each.

Was this thing, which had been to her the source of so much hindrance and disquiet, not indeed to be done with once for all when it was laid in the grave, or consumed on the pyre?

Was this bodily life, which her beloved had lost indeed thought of value enough to be delivered or be restored?

She had found a kind of joy in despising and heaping indignities on this fleshly prison, from which her beloved had been delivered.

If to that holiest Sufferer it had been restored, there was then still some defect in the condition of her dead.

It seemed as if the resurrection of One threw a shadow on the immortality and the perfection of the rest.

Moreover, how, and from what cause, had He risen? Was it not from a cause which isolated Him from the rest of humanity? Had not He, as the holiest Son of men, risen by virtue of His superiority to other men, perhaps by virtue of His being in some mysterious, separate sense a Son of God?

Still, moreover, from those heavens no word seemed to come for the Gentiles.

Into that heavenly Temple, as in the Temple at Jerusalem, was there then no admission save for the Jew? To all ages, for all but His race, nothing but a dim longing for His shadow to pass by, for some far-off echo of His voice?

A proclamation of pardon had indeed, it was said, been

sent from heaven to His betrayers and murderers; but only, as far as could be understood, to Jews: to Jews, who had done Him the utmost dishonour and wrong; but not, it seemed, to any Gentiles, even if they would have desired above all things to pay Him homage.

Indeed, as far as she could gather, the utterances of His followers seemed to be less universal than His own; the disciples more Jewish than the Master.

Jews of every nation under heaven had heard, and believed, and been accepted; but of those nations themselves, not one.

What access was there for the Gentile?

If through the Jews, by taking the lowliest position which could associate them with the nation He had loved on earth and now loved in heaven, even the lowliest position might be welcome.

But what sign was there of even such an expansion of the old boundaries?

The link between God and this dying, risen Son of man seemed perfect.

There seemed to be a link acknowledged between Him, the Jewish Christ, and the Jew.

But where was the link between the Gentile and the Jew, between the Gentile and the Jewish Christ, the Son of God?

Another defeat was to precede the Victory which opened the way to that further universal Conquest.

Another vanquished, and another Victory.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE votive altar to Germanicus at Antioch, where his funeral pyre had been raised, and the tribunal at Epidaphne, where he had died, might be visited now without arousing Imperial suspicions.

The ashes of Agrippina might be removed from the unhonoured grave on the lonely island of Pandataria, and laid beside the ashes of her husband in the Imperial mausoleum by the Tiber.

For the son of Germanicus and Agrippina had succeeded to the Imperial throne. Caligula, the play-fellow of the soldiers on the Rhine, was Emperor.

Tiberius was dead. The long strain was over with which for so many years he and Rome had watched against each other—the Emperor as a keeper, with his eye and hand ceaselessly fixed on the wild beast, which, if he turned aside for an instant, would be ready to spring at him; Rome, with her eye on him as on a madman who could only be kept from some caprice of malice by incessant deference and amusement.

The long watch was relaxed at last. The restraining grasp had collapsed ; and now, throughout the Empire, men began to say aloud the frightful things they had long believed of him—things of which it is almost as terrible to think they should have been credible at Rome, as practicable at Capreæ.

But until the very last that watch of mutual terror did not relax in the slightest degree. To the last the physicians dared not let the Emperor know they thought him dying. To the last the Emperor dared not let the Romans know that he was dying. Terribly awake to the truth of facts around him as he had been throughout his life, to the end the keen eyes saw as clearly as ever, and saw, only to distrust.

For himself he created no illusions. For years he had felt himself within the shadow which must spread and deepen before him until it blotted out the universe. Old age and death for him made no dimness, they only removed any dazzling haze which might yet linger about the world, and left everything distinct and sharply outlined as if seen through a vacuum. At times the mere clearness of the seeing made it foreseeing.

To some who were paying court to his nephew Caligula he said, "You leave the setting sun to court the rising." To Caligula himself, "*You will kill my grandson, and some one else will kill you.*"

Yet he persisted in keeping the courtiers in suspense and dread by refusing to name his successor, and by oc-

casionally throwing out hints that he might after all cause both his grandson and his nephew to die before himself.

Few passages in history have a more unrelieved blackness than the last days of Tiberius. Their story is too mean to be called tragical. Even the defiance of death which in an old Norse warrior might have had something heroic, in Tiberius is merely revolting. It is so evidently one terror held in check by another—the dread of dying vanquished by the dread of seeming death-stricken to Rome; lest at the very last, before his hand relaxed in death, the wolf he had cowed so long should turn and make its deadly spring at him, and have the mastery.

On his last journey towards Rome, seven miles from the city, terrified by a bad omen, he turned back along the Appian Way. Yet after an increase of illness and languor he roused himself, at Circeii, to preside at the games, and even to throw javelins at the wild beasts in the amphitheatre.

The Romans had called him “morose,” because he did not delight enough in the gladiatorial combats. Some Romans now deemed his strength failing. He would show them all their double mistake.

At the villa of Lucullus, however, he had to pause before once more he could retire from Campania to his retreat at Capreæ.

He dismissed his physician.

The physician, in taking leave, contrived to press an inquiring finger on his pulse.

The sick man observed it, and insisted that night on prolonging the festivities beyond the usual hour.

Yet at the very last, in spite of all his precautions, it was believed the terror which had haunted his life came true.

He rallied once too often for the patience of his attendants. They suffocated him with his pillows.

"The wolf has vanquished at last," old Laon said. "Tiberius Cæsar was right: *Men are mortal, and States are eternal*. It is a hopeless struggle with a wild beast, which will be as strong as ever for its deadly spring when the restraining human hand relaxes its grasp for ever. Now the worshippers of Tiberius are free to erect him as many temples as they like. During his lifetime he restrained their enthusiasm; now their adoration can rise freely. If it has anything of the character of the worship of this new Jewish sect at Jerusalem, whose adoration has gathered new strength from death, now is the moment for its expansion."

Meantime, at Rome, the citizens were shouting over the Emperor's corpse, "Tiberius to the Tiber," and throwing their whole energies into the welcome of the young Emperor who was thenceforth to be their divine dispenser of bread and games.

Once more Caius Cæsar Caligula walked in a funeral procession along the Appian Way. Eighteen years

before, a child of seven, he had accompanied his mother, the widowed Agrippina, from Brundisium with the Sacred Urn containing his father's ashes.

Even on his childish imagination the thronging of the people from village and town, the burning of incense and costly raiment, the silence and the tears of the multitude, must have left an indelible impression.

And now it was Germanicus again the people were welcoming back in the person of his son. Altars greeted him on all sides with incense and sacrifices ; torches and flowers, and festive welcomes, such as, on another spring day in May, twenty years ago, had greeted his father's triumph, when, as an infant of four years old—the darling of the legions—Caligula had mounted the Capitol with his four boy brothers in the triumphal chariot by his father's side.

Father and brothers all were dead, it was believed, all through the murderous envy of Tiberius. And now again the Italians in this procession were celebrating, not the obsequies of Tiberius, but the Triumph of the race of Germanicus. They welcomed the young Emperor as the child of the beloved of Rome. They lavished caressing names on him, calling him their "nursling," their "chicken," their "puppet," and to the end persisted in distinguishing him (not to his own satisfaction) by the pet name given to him by the legions among whom Germanicus and Agrippina had their early home.

There is a pathetic irony in the fact that the prince whom the nations learned to execrate as a monster of cruelty, continues to be called in the gravest histories by the name of the baby-military boots made in imitation of their own, which the soldiers liked to see him wear in his father's camp on the Rhine.

Twenty years had passed since the multitudes had gathered in a tumult of exultant welcome around Germanicus the Conqueror; eighteen, since they had gathered silent and weeping around his ashes. And now they met once more full of hope and confidence, once more trusting they had found the heart they could rest on, the hand that could lead them.

* * * * *

And, meantime, the Heart the whole world can rest on had been broken on the Cross; the Hand that can lead all the flocks of men had been nailed by men to the Cross. He who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, who had compassion on the multitudes because they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, the true Shepherd of men, had ministered to men, had given His life a ransom for men, had risen to His Father's throne, and from it was slowly gathering His flock from the East and the West, the North and the South, a great multitude which no man can number. The voice not of the stranger had been heard, the great gathering and separating of the flocks had begun.

But these multitudes of Roman men as yet knew not

of it, and wistfully looked to Caius Cæsar Caligula to be their prince and their saviour.

At first he seemed, in many ways, to meet their expectations. He pardoned royally, and gave royally, fulfilling the dying bequests of the Empress Livia which her own son had neglected. He also worked royally, throwing himself with a passionate energy during the summer months into the enormous labours devolving on a rule which had absorbed so many powers into itself.

And then the good things he had inherited from a high and virtuous ancestry seemed to sink and be lost beneath the corruptions of his training at Capreæ, and the intoxication of his intolerable position. He is said to have abandoned himself with a frenzy of license to every kind of pleasure ; in eight months to have thus brought himself to the brink of the grave ; to have risen from the brink of the grave a madman, totally bereft of self-control, yet still invested with the supreme control of the whole Roman world,—clever, witty, keen-sighted, but insane, and the Emperor and Divinity of Rome.

The worship which Tiberius had refused, it became his moody pleasure to insist on. His making the Temple of Hercules a mere portico to his palace on the Palatine, was a symbol of the place he claimed. The temples of all the gods were to be porticoes to his. Some men might have a special devotion for one divinity, some for

There was no sign of any change in the Gentile world. The believers were all Jews. The city of David, the city of the great King, was still the city of the Christ and His disciples.

It was in the old Temple, on its ancient heights, that they met and poured forth their new psalms.

Reports came, indeed, of an opposition still continued by the Sanhedrim, of some of the leaders of the new community being imprisoned and beaten.

But the persecution seemed neither to have checked their joy nor the increase of their numbers.

Was it only a beginning?

If so, to what would it grow?

Or was it a beginning of the terrible end? A gathering of the elect into the citadel before the battles with burning and fire; a little gleam of light before the day of storms and thick darkness, of the shaking once more not of earth only but also of heaven, the day of the great slaughter when the towers should fall? A gathering of the righteous into the Ark before the floods came, floods of fire, to which the ancient-world deluge would be as nothing?

For Clælia Diodora the tidings of the Resurrection from the sepulchre awakened mingled feelings.

If she could have been absolutely assured in any other way of continued deathless life in power and joy, she would contentedly have dispensed with the thought of the body being raised.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

NOW they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Simple, unemphasized words, yet containing in them the record of the foundation of the Catholic Church—of the transition from Judaism to Christianity.

At last the invasion of the world by the Church began.

To some of those who first entered the opening, it seemed, doubtless, not a portal into a new world, but a breach in the walls of the old ; not a gathering, but a scattering.

The law of the Kingdom—expansion through ruin, victory through the vanquished, death through life, the

crown through the cross, growth through dissolution—
had begun to act.

* * * * *

At last the missing link came into the hand of Clœlia Diodora.

Into the heart so long broken, at last the healing balm was poured. The chasm so rudely torn, and hollowed so deep, was filled up to the brim, filled to overflowing with the waters of life, ready to pour forth in blessing on all around.

Feeling, to the core of her heart, the death that gnaws at the heart of all the visible world, she had learned that life is deeper and stronger than death.

Feeling, deeper still, the sin which is the death in life, the death in death, she had learned that love, which is the life of life and the death of death, is at the heart of all. She had learned that God is love.

Feeling the terrible isolation of her own lot—without father, mother, brother, sister—new relationships were revealed to her; new, yet older than her life; love familiar with every secret of her life and character.

In heaven she had found the Father.

On earth truest and tenderest ties of kindred;—
brothers, sisters, mother.

And all these through and in One.

Child of God, in the Son of God.

Sister in the redeemed family, through Him who was not ashamed to call us brothers.

Redeemed to be no more her own. Set free to serve.
Words of infinite joy and perfect freedom !

“NOT OUR OWN !” Redeemed from the bondage of
self-seeking, from the isolation of self-will.

Set free to serve in a world which had such infinite
need of service. Sent forth with hands full of the Bread
of God, the news of the infinite love of God, into that
world which was, although it knew it not, dying of hunger,
which the Church knew for God.

Belonging no longer to herself, but to Him who had
left His heavens to seek, and given His life to save ;
belonging to that crucified Lord, to that patient King ;
belonging to Him more than a Roman daughter to her
father, than a Roman bride to her lord ; belonging in
Him to the Father, who had loved her from the begin-
ning.

No more drifting aimlessly to and fro on the sea of
life. Piloted !

Glorious contradictions of Christian life !

Nothing changed ; yet everything changed.

Not a burden lightened ; not a sorrow removed ; not
a new faculty bestowed.

The crippled, suffering body crippled and suffering
still ; the bereaved heart still bereft of sight, word, and
touch of its dearest.

But the burden changed from a shapeless, meaningless
load into a cross ; into the likeness of what He had
borne for us ; into a yoke, not pressing on the neck

bowed to it, but binding it to the appointed work ; into a sacrifice, accepted willingly in subjection to the Father's will ; into a weapon of the great warfare, whereby the Victory of the Vanquished was to be for ever carried on ; carried on not only by the little portion of the Church visible on earth, but by the great multitude—great even then—who were invisible to mortal eyes, with the victorious risen Lord.

Every faculty she possessed consecrated, glorified, stamped with the Image of the King, made current coin of the heavenly Kingdom, an instrument of service in the hand of love. Not transformation ; new creation—every old thing made new by being inspired through and through with the new life. Yet not more a new birth, or a new life, or a new world for her, or for any in those earliest days, than now for all who, receiving the same Saviour, receive in Him the revelation of the eternal love, the power to become sons of God.

Not merely a new impulse was Christianity, breaking up the old world : it was a new life. It is as much as ever it was, not in us, nor in anything done for and in us, but in Him who not merely raises and quickens, but is the Resurrection and the Life.

Nor only were suffering, death, the unseen world, redeemed and consecrated in her eyes. If the Cross had opened a path of light into the world to which it had borne the Master—if His death had hallowed dying—His Resurrection had opened her eyes again to this

visible world, as His creation and His inheritance. If His burial had made the sepulchre the gate of heaven, His rising again had made life its threshold. If His "Not my will but thine be done" had consecrated sorrow, His "Peace be unto you" had consecrated gladness.

Not the life beyond this lower world only ; the life of little children also, dancing along the first steps of the long journey—every stage and every station of life were sacred, through that human life which He had taken in its infancy, borne without sin, resigned without sin, and resumed never to part with more. Not in the cemetery only, in the starry night, in the proseucha, in the synagogue ; but in Hilda's home among the little children—on the sea-shore which His feet had trodden—beside the tables whose fare He, risen, had blessed and shared,—that Redemption had made her at home.

To Siward all the brightest hopes and most earnest purposes of his youth came back glorified. He had found the Deliverer, the King who set free by reigning—who gave the true freedom, not of the beasts of the forest, but of the Kingdom—who began the liberation of men from within by setting them free from the bondage of self. Christianity did not quench patriotism in him, but exalted it, as every other pure human feeling. The Church, in those early days of divine order and growth, did not take the colour and shape out of the nationalities any more than out of the characters she embraced. Her

“In Christ Jesus, neither Jew nor Greek,” no more destroyed distinct national ideals, than her “In Christ, neither male nor female,” destroyed the true manly and womanly ideal. In Him nothing that characterized was lost, only all that separated: not distinctions, only barriers were broken down.

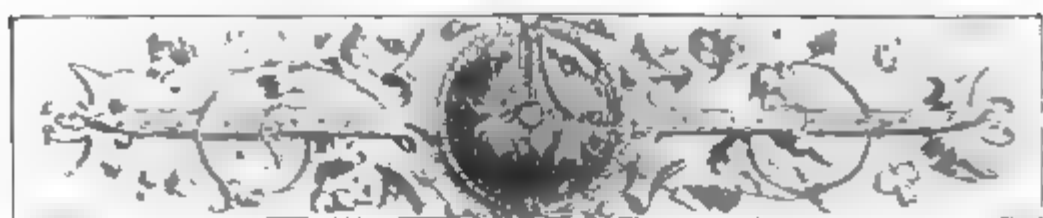
Never did Siward's heart beat more warmly for his people, nor the hearts of Cloelia, Callias, and Esther for theirs, than when they began to see the fulfilment of the highest ideal of Teutonic liberty, Roman duty, Greek order and humanity, and Hebrew godliness in the One Lord of all, and to hope for its fulfilment in the One Family of many brethren. The new Kingdom had indeed begun, which makes Antioch a place well-nigh as sacred to the Church as Jerusalem. If Jerusalem was the Bethlehem of the Church, where the angels rejoiced and sang peace and good-will to man around the manger of infant Christianity, Antioch was its Nazareth, the first home of its conscious youth—the baptistry where its one distinctive name was given to it—the first place where the Jewish nation was incorporated into the Universal Church as but one Province of the Universal Empire, where the gates of morning at length were flung open wide for the Light to lighten the Gentiles.

The restless, keen-witted crowds of various races which thronged the long colonnades by the Orontes, or ranged through the gardens of Epidaphne, little thought that in exercising their faculty and their license of giving

characteristic names on the little band of believers of all nations, they were rendering a service to the world ; and that when the gardens of Epidaphne had vanished, like an enchanted garden in a desert, and the Orontes, instead of bathing marble temples, crowded quays, palaces and amphitheatres, should flow through a poor little Syrian town, that one carelessly flung sobriquet should make the name of Antioch familiar in countless homes throughout the world. “ *The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.*”

Do we think sufficiently what a glowing commendation on those first disciples is involved in the fact that such a name should have been characteristic ?





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OLD Laon still held aloof, and kept silence. Onias and Siguna were the two members of the little company whose hearts were least satisfied by the tidings of great joy which, like the music of the legend, drew the living stones together, and began the building of the City of God.

For very different reasons. More than ever Siguna longed for one more sight of her husband, that they might yet rejoice together over the treasure she had found. The instinct that he still was living, the hope that they should yet meet face to face upon the earth, had never been quenched in her heart ; and now, in the light of the New Hope, the old hope sprang up in fresh vigour.

Her child Hilda was at home now in the East. She determined to remain no longer away from Rome, but to spend the rest of her life in that centre of the world, watching once again every company of captives, or every strange band of wanderers which found its way from the North to the Imperial City, which so many of her countrymen still deemed a Golden Home of Gods.

Onias, on the other hand, was inextricably perplexed by being brought into contact with a question which absolutely demanded a decision.

Between the recognition that the Nazarene was the Messiah and the declaration that He had deceived the people, no vague and generalizing neutrality was possible. It was not a mere matter of religious opinion, about which there might be infinite shades of thought—from a fervent acquiescence to a fanatical denial. It was a question of loyalty or rebellion : not a devout notion about the other world, but a practical test as to this ; a question which affected acquaintanceships, daily action, commercial connections—not the mere superfluous income or expenditure of life, but its very capital and essence.

For the Church which the Antiochenes knew so well how to name characteristically came among them as no mere glad and loving child, vividly conscious of her life but half unconscious of her mission and her destiny. At Antioch, above the child-like robe of gladness and singleness of heart which found favour with all the people, and which she must ever wear next her heart, she had been indued with the panoply of her warfare, and was no longer merely breaking bread from house to house in gladness and simplicity, and praising God in the Temple, but was going forth conquering and to conquer.

This warfare of the Church required the sinews of war.

Whatever theory may be adopted as to the use of the gift of tongues in saving the first Christian missionaries the necessity of learning languages, it is clear that no gift of an inexhaustible purse was bestowed on the early Church ; that Alexandrian corn-ships would not remit their fares for apostles, unless in the keeping of centurions ; that houses could not be hired in Rome or in Corinth for nothing.

The community of goods at Jerusalem—among a community perhaps at no time wealthy—had ended, as Onias predicted, in the necessity of contributions for the poor brethren in Judæa. And from the beginning it seemed as if Antioch was expected to be one of the treasuries of the Church—a distinction which must have involved continual decisions between God and Mammon for the rich merchants and capitalists who lived there.

Onias would have been quite content to wait, in a most tolerant spirit, to see, by the success or failure of the new doctrine, what decision had been made about it in heaven. But the disciples of the new doctrine were determined it should succeed ; the subjects of the new Kingdom were determined to conquer—to conquer, if necessary, like the King, by suffering or by dying. And in this way the decision was thrown, not on heaven, but on the consciences of every man and woman who came within hearing ; which was far more perplexing.

Moreover, with Esther by his side ready to risk everything, divested of all fear, or triumphing over all fear—

saying in her inmost heart joyfully, "If I perish, I perish," like Esther the queen; ready to follow up the confession of the three children, "Our God whom we serve is able to save us," with their sublime "but if not"—and to enter the furnace whether "not a hair of her head were singed" by it, or her whole body were consumed to ashes;—this difficulty was increased an hundredfold.

Tenderly she bore with the fretfulness and anxious carefulness which his perplexities produced in the old man. She knew they sprang from a root of bitterness within, which must at any cost be extracted, or it would choke all the roots of truth and love which she believed had once been there.

Any axe would have been welcome to her which could be laid at the root of that corrupt tree. And at last it came.

The Jews, stronger in faith and conscience than any other nation, even in this hour of their fatal fall, had alone of all races throughout the empire refused to give divine honours to Caligula. Worship meant more to them than to any other people, because the name of God meant more.

Terrible tidings had reached Antioch of a popular riot against the Jews at Alexandria.

Only a few years after the Jewish nation had suffered her King to be crucified at Jerusalem, the Greek and Coptic population of Alexandria, always envious of the

marvellous commercial genius and success of the Jewish colony there, were roused to fury by the arrival among them of Herod Agrippa, with the title, freshly recognized by his friend the Emperor, of King of the Jews.

That these Jewish merchants and brokers should actually pretend to have a king of their own, was an assumption not to be tolerated.

In revengeful mockery, their Coptic and Greek fellow-citizens paraded a Jewish idiot through the streets, robed in ragged garments, crowned with a crown of papyrus, with a reed in his right hand, and bent the knee to him, presenting him petitions, and hailing him "lord." So fiercely was the cry of the Jewish priests, "*We have no king but Cæsar,*" taken up and hurled back at them by the Gentiles.

Persecution in its most terrible form—a persecution by the populace—followed. The Jews, who possessed two out of the five quarters of the city, and were also scattered everywhere throughout it, were driven relentlessly into one district. Within these narrow limits multitudes of them died of hunger and bad air, whilst those who ventured outside were relentlessly seized and torn to pieces—the governor, Flaccus, making no effort to check the exasperated people.

Fearful details of death by every kind of torture and insult reached the Jewish community at Antioch.

To the early Christians, persecution, ignominy, and death could have been no signs of divine abandonment

That lesson, at least, must have been stamped deep on every heart, while the Cross still was to the mass of men the symbol, not of a religion, but of crime ignominiously punished.

But in the mind of Onias these things awakened many fears and suspicions. What if, after all, the unutterable wonder-working Name were no longer on their side? What if, after all, the execution at Calvary had been a crime (and if a crime there could be no doubt of its enormity); if the silence of heaven had only been the gathering of the thunders, and this were the first burst of the avenging lightnings?

Yet there might be another explanation. These Alexandrian Jews were for the most part Hellenists. The more orthodox Rabbis had pronounced it as great a fall to learn Greek as to rear swine. These Alexandrian Jews had translated the Sacred Scriptures into Greek, thus casting the sacred pearls before swine. They had even endeavoured, it was said, to extract, by allegorizing interpretations and double meanings, a mystical philosophy, half Greek, half Oriental, from the Prophecies and Histories. Might it not be possible that the wrath which had fallen on these Hellenists was for their special Hellenistic sins?—that because they had set up the stumbling-block of Grecian philosophy in their hearts, it was thus permitted that the heathen rabble should set up as they had done heathen idols in their synagogues and houses of prayer?

But this refuge did not suffice to shelter him long.

The storm drew nearer.

The decree went forth from Cæsar Caligula that a colossal statue of himself should be made, for the purpose of being enshrined in the Holy of Holies of the Temple at Jerusalem.

The rumour aroused the Syrian Jews not to rebellion, but to something deeper. The inmost heart of that old Hebrew patriotism, always more fervent and indestructible than any other, was touched. The whole nation was stirred with something of the spirit which moved the three children who chose the furnace rather than the idolatry.

Clothed in sackcloth, with ashes on their heads, they gathered in troops from all quarters around the Roman Governor, Petronius, at Ptolemais.

The command of the Emperor was unconditional. Two legions, usually stationed on the Euphrates, were, if necessary, to be concentrated on Judæa, to enforce the violation of the Jewish Temple. The resistance of the whole nation was not to be suffered to prevent it.

But Petronius dared to deliberate. Unlike that former Procurator of Judæa, whose fear of offending Cæsar had not saved him from banishment ere this to Gaul, to the people he presented a firm front, whilst in private he held a council and debated calmly how to avert the collision.

To the Jews gathered before him in mourning gar-

ments—an immense crowd of men, women, and children—he vouchsafed no words but those of the sternest rebuke. “He must obey the Emperor, and they must obey him.”

They replied that they must obey God rather than Cæsar; that they would all die rather than suffer the Holy Place of their God to be thus desecrated. The worship of Caligula created no enthusiasm to oppose to a religious and patriotic fervour genuine as this was, and Petronius was humane. He left his troops at Ptolemais, and repaired to Tiberias to see if this passion of resistance was really universal among the people.

* * * * *

One evening Esther was returning with Clœlia Diadora from the house of Hilda and Callias.

The gardens of Epidaphne were glorious then with the first burst of spring flowers, and they had brought back branches of blossoms.

It was the first day of the week, and their hearts had been gladdened by some new details of the life over which they knew death had no dominion; some new narrative of those miracles whose marvel was even more in the way they were done than in the wonders themselves:—the touch of the outcast leper, the commendation of the grateful Samaritan, the majesty which cleared the ruler’s house of the hired mourners before the miracle took all cause of real mourning away.

Some new saying, brief and heart-stirring, of the lips

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that spake as never man spake, never more to be lost from the heart ; some new memory of the look such as that which melted all the ice from Peter's heart ; of the divine long-suffering silence of the night of passion ; some new incident of the glimpses on shore or hill-side, in the house or by the way, of Him whom death and resurrection had no power to change.

Unutterably full of interest must have been those gatherings where the sermons were the text on which Christendom has lived for centuries, where the gospels were written on the hearts of those earliest Christians before they were embodied in any manuscript.

They had met together at the Table where He is evermore the Master of the feast, not in memorial only, but in living presence.

Something of the calm, deep joy which possessed her that evening must have shone over the pale features of Esther ; for as she passed along the great colonnade which traversed the city, many among the groups of idlers paused in their conversation and looked at her with a kind of surprise, blended in some with pity, and in others with contempt.

She was well known in the city. Her good works and alms-deeds could not be altogether hidden, extending as they did beyond the limits of the synagogue ; and her husband had the perilous reputation of being one of the wealthiest Jewish brokers resident there. But, for the most part, the glances were far from friendly.

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She entered the house, pale indeed, but with no sign of agitation in voice or bearing.

Onias was there before her. She found him in the little inner chamber, crouching on the ground like a hunted animal, his hands clasped round his knees, and his face buried between them.

She knelt beside him, bowed her head as low as his, and touched his forehead.

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He had half hoped, half feared she would scarcely have heeded these tidings—would no longer identify herself with the nation who had committed what she regarded as such unequalled crime, and which now seemed to him falling under such unequalled vengeance.

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A bitter envy was always ready to overflow against a race which was so successful and so exclusive, so rich and so "morose," so hard to borrow from, and yet so necessary to those who wanted to borrow.

"Clœlia, what has happened?" Esther whispered at length, laying a trembling hand on the arm of the Roman maiden. "See how angrily they gaze at us!"

The crippled Diodora was too much accustomed to be a butt of the wit of Antioch to have noticed anything unusual.

"I never let myself see that mocking stare," she said. And very quietly she added, "I used to feel it so bitterly. But not now. I think of the mocking stare of the multitude He bore for us."

But soon insolent words came in explanation of the contemptuous looks.

"A strange occasion for a Jewish matron to choose for parading the streets with garlands and smiles!"

"Ah! probably she is of that new sect of theirs, to which the nation is nothing; their crucified Christ everything!"

"Still, Caius Cæsar enshrined in their Temple might try the patience even of a Christian."

Esther stopped, and fearlessly turning to the man who had spoken these words, said,—

"What news has arrived? Of what ill tidings do you speak?"

"Only of the decree of Cæsar Caligula, commanding

she added, "no blow from His hand would be unwelcome. And who knows but they might even yet repent,—at Tiberias, as at Jerusalem? I know well that when He menaces, it is but a stronger form of entreaty to drive those who will not be won to Him."

The old man bowed his head on his breast.

"I, at least, have deserved any stroke from His hand," he murmured. And, after a pause, "We will go," he replied; and saying these words, he met her eyes with a look, straight and untroubled, such as she had not seen on his face for many a year.

He said not a word of the great sacrifices they might have to make. He had risen, for the time at least, to another level; and from it they looked, not great, but nothing.

Hastily they made arrangements for the journey. The next morning Esther was somewhat troubled to see him enter the treasure-chamber, from which he so often came with a care-worn, perplexed countenance. But this time, after some minutes, he came out of the door with a look of quiet determination, far more reassuring to her than the most radiant smile.

"I have only been labelling the pledged property: to be restored to the owners," he said, "if we do not come back again; perhaps some of it, if we do."

Once more also the old love for her had sprung up from beneath the load of care which had so long crushed it down. And it was with a heart lightened of its

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least entreat, and babes can kneel; and, if needful, women as well as men can die."

"Esther," he said, "I had thought you would look at this as inevitable—as the necessary consequence of that Death."

"That Death was voluntary," she said, "to the last dying cry. He gave Himself without spot to God, a ransom for us. He died rather than deny Himself to be the Son of God. If it is to be, my husband, we will let our death be voluntary. We will die rather than deny our God."

"But, to you, Gentiles, Greeks, barbarians are brethren," he said. "Is your heart indeed Jewish still? I always feared you might die for being a Christian. But would you also die for being a Jewess?"

"I would die if God called me and strengthened me," she said, in a low voice, "rather than do anything, or suffer anything to be done, which He has forbidden. Was not He sent first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Did not He drive the traffickers from the Temple?—and shall we, if we can hinder it, suffer an idol to be set up in its inmost sanctuary?"

He rose from the ground, and raising her, took her hands, and looked with intense inquiry into her face.

"But what if this is the vengeance for the Cross?" he asked, in a hollow voice.

"If it be," she said, calmly, "all the more would I go and pray with my people, and suffer with them. To me,"

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Were there none who thought how the Holy City had been desecrated with a desecration beside which even this threatened pollution of the Sanctuary was but as a momentary accidental ceremonial defilement of some outmost court ?

Were there none who knew how the Son, the Beloved of God, had been rejected ; the Sanctuary of His sacred life desolated and desecrated, the very express Image of the Father dishonoured ?

To Esther it seemed as if her whole people stood now, silent and sentenced, before the Roman governor, in the place to which they had betrayed their King.

She knelt on the ground, and wondered and wept. Yet not altogether bitter or hopeless tears.

Could it be that her people were awaking, at last, and not even yet too late ?

The long-suffering they had wearied was so unconquerable ; the love they had despised so infinite ! And always, she thought, in that day of inhuman ingratitude, as in this day of heroic patriotism, then as now, now as then, these multitudes, with their blind anger and their blind trust, " know so little what they do."

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heaviest anxieties that Esther accomplished the solemn journey to Tiberias.

They said little by the way. It was a strange sight that met their eyes as they approached the Sea of Galilee.

It was the sowing-time. But all along the slopes and levels of those fertile shores, not a labourer was to be seen. They urged their mules through a silent land, and when they came to the brow of the hill above Tiberias—below, bordering the shore, and girding the city around, they could distinguish a dense, dark mass of human beings.

“Indeed, indeed as sheep having no shepherd!” she said, bursting into tears. “They urged the Good Shepherd to depart out of their coasts, and He has gone.”

Esther would not ride further. Onias also dismounted; and covering themselves with sackcloth, they walked slowly down the hill to join the suppliant multitude of their compatriots. Different, indeed, was this dark-robed silent crowd from the listening expectant throng that a few years before had gathered on those shores!

No rich tints or picturesque forms of Oriental costume varied the sombre uniformity.

All were clothed in sackcloth. Many had ashes strewn on their heads.

Men of all ages and ranks, women and little children—all subdued into one voiceless company of suppliants.

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He had but to obey, he said. The statue was already in the hands of Sidonian carvers at Ptolemais. Day by day, whilst they waited there, the shapeless marble was growing into the image of Cæsar. Would they fight against their Emperor?

The rulers replied they had no thought of war; but they would be massacred rather than break their law.

And prostrate on the ground, with expressive Oriental gestures, they offered their necks to the sword. The soldiers might slay them, unresisting, one by one. The power of Rome was invincible. But no power on earth could compel them to live, and see the Temple of the Lord made the Temple of an idol.

For forty days this silent pleading continued.

Strange and awful days and nights to Esther. Did none beside herself in that suppliant crowd see any strange significance, any strange contrast in all this?

Were there none there who had felt the healing touches, heard the matchless teaching? Were there none who had listened to the Beatitudes? Were there none who had listened to the Woes?—"Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida."

To her the whole silence seemed full of that Woe; so entreating, so reluctant, so sure.

Were there none who thought of that night and morning of silent endurance, of the gracious Divine Sufferer buffeted to and fro among Roman soldiers and Jewish

priests, or brought at last before another Roman governor less compassionate and just than Petronius, with no voice among the thousands He had helped and healed raised to plead for Him ?

Were there none who thought how the Holy City had been desecrated with a desecration beside which even this threatened pollution of the Sanctuary was but as a momentary accidental ceremonial defilement of some outmost court ?

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" Father, forgive them."

As she wept and prayed, the echo of the " Woe!"

seemed to fall fainter, until the silence grew full of those later words of unquenchable pity,—

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

* * * * *

At last the relief came.

Petronius assembled the people to hear his decision.

He was risking everything for himself, by delaying the execution of the edict. He knew it, and they knew it. But he was determined to take the risk, rather than lay waste the province he had been sent to govern.

He promised to do his utmost to obtain the repeal of the decree. Meantime the Sidonian carvers should be stopped in their work. The statue should be left unfinished.

And before the answer could arrive from Rome, the Emperor himself had fallen, pierced with many wounds from the hands of assassins: the body from which was modelled the image which was to have desecrated the Jewish Temple was cast into a dishonoured grave.

As Petronius ended his merciful speech to the Jewish suppliants at Tiberias, the shadow of clouds not felt for weeks began to soften the sultry, pitiless glare.

And before the day closed, on all the burned-up slopes and parched plains came down refreshing showers of rain.

Quietly, with glad hearts, the crowds dispersed to vineyard, orchard, and corn-field.

There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

For many days this voiceless petition had been presented before the governor, remaining perplexed and uncertain within the walls of the city of Tiberias.

When Esther and Onias reached this multitude of their people, many faces already looked worn with watching.

Silently they took their places in the crowd.

Day after day the thousands assembled there remained, their numbers slowly increasing, and none departing.

It was an unusually sultry season even for that sultry hollow of the lake, with its tropical heat and fertility.

All day they were exposed to the sun, shining in his strength, from the first moment of his breaking like a giant from the screen of the eastern ridges, to the last when he disappeared behind the green mount of the Beatitudes.

The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

who had great possessions, '*Come, and leave all, and follow Me.*' All through these silent days and nights I have been seeking Him. And now at last I have found Him—I have found the Christ, our Christ, the Saviour of the world. I have found that it is still possible to follow Him; and good above all things to follow Him, even to death, even to His death. And I find that leaving all for Him, is leaving nothing but care, and chains, and a prison-house."



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journey eastward with Germanicus, the terrible thing rose black against the golden sky.

Once more their eyes met, and each became conscious that the other had seen it.

They drew closer, and spoke of that evening long ago.

"It was before me then," Siward said, "as the most terrible possibility of slavery."

"It is before our hearts always now," Siguna said, "as the measure of His love for us."

"And as the measure of the sacrifice which may be involved in ours for Him," he replied.

He meant the words quite literally; yet he spoke them in a tone which made them sound like a song of triumph.

The world, as far as it concerned itself with them at all, knew well that their Master had been crucified, and had been buried. His cross had been visible enough. From morning till night it had stood close to one of the stateliest cities of the Empire,—the Jerusalem of Herod the Great.

The gospel the early disciples had to tell was that His sepulchre was empty—that He had risen.

Their message was the Resurrection.

Their life was the Cross.

A continual patience with all, a perpetual sacrifice of all, for His sake, a perpetual victory through apparent defeat, a triumphing through suffering. In her martyr-

Once more, they thought, the God of their fathers had appeared for them.

Once more, as much His gift and sign of protection as if smitten from the rock, He had sent them the living waters from heaven.

Once more, Esther thought, "He had sent His rain on the just and the unjust, and caused His sun to shine on the evil and on the good."

With some anxiety as to the issue of this deliverance on Onias, she recommenced the homeward journey.

Would he regard this rescue as but another proof of prosperity being the sign from heaven, and be led once more to deny the Messiahship of Him whose life had ended, to the eyes of his nation, in defeat and death?

She need not have feared.

The cutting off of the right hand, which it had been to him to abandon all his treasures, and place himself as a beggar among the suppliant crowds of his people, had raised him to an altogether higher level. The single-hearted act had cleared the dim and troubled eyes. And he saw things as they are.

"Once more He has been patient and long-suffering with us," she said softly, as they mounted the slopes from the lake.

"Patient and long-suffering even with me, my beloved!" he replied. "I have found Him at last. All through those weary days and nights I heard a Voice saying, in the words you once told me He spoke to one

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONCE more on the way to Rome—to the centre of the world, to the source of Law and Government, of wonderful order, and of disorders, crimes and corruptions unutterable—with the Sacred Wood, the Tree of Life, in their keeping, to cast into the bitter fountains!

Not outwardly did the early Christians bear the symbol of the cross, not even on their sepulchres.

The power of it was on their hearts. The symbol was visibly before them too often, and too terribly complete; the symbol not of victory, but of the utmost humiliation and defeat a human life could reach, such as the guillotine and the gallows would but feebly represent to us.

Not in bronze and marble, and the pathos of religious sculpture; in its own unmitigated horror and ignominy, it met the eyes of the little Christian company as they returned from Syria to Rome.

Siward and his mother were once more slowly pacing, one spring evening, along the Appian Way, when once more, on the brow of an opposite hill, as before on their



CHAPTER XL.

ONCE more in the Pomœrium, in the desert in the midst of the City, the sacred waste

Once more Clœlia Diodora knelt on the ground at night by the Tomb of the Vestal.

The memories of the lonely nights and days spent there were present with her again, the memory of all the restless searching hither and thither for some voice to tell her of her dead, for some channel into that dark under-world.

What had changed to her since then ?

She remembered how, with a kind of triumph in the midst of her anguish, she had looked on palace and temple, and on all the pomp of life in the City, and had thought, "Not Tiberius Cæsar, but Death, is the Universal Lord ! That which has triumphed over my beloved will lay low and triumph over all—beautiful women, strong men, soldiers, senators, emperors. Whatever seems, Death alone reigns."

What had changed since then, that everything was changed to her ?

ages, while the cup of her Lord was continually in her hand, the raiment of the Church was the white, glistening robe of joy. The world provided her with the Cross, and the Crucified with the Crown.

When the world provides the crowns, the Master can give the Cross.

For in this world the Cross may not be absent, though the crowning very well may ; and the true crowning must, throughout the ages.





CHAPTER XL.

ONCE more in the Pomœrium, in the desert in the midst of the City, the sacred waste

Once more Clœlia Diodora knelt on the ground at night by the Tomb of the Vestal.

The memories of the lonely nights and days spent there were present with her again, the memory of all the restless searching hither and thither for some voice to tell her of her dead, for some channel into that dark under-world.

What had changed to her since then ?

She remembered how, with a kind of triumph in the midst of her anguish, she had looked on palace and temple, and on all the pomp of life in the City, and had thought, "Not Tiberius Cæsar, but Death, is the Universal Lord ! That which has triumphed over my beloved will lay low and triumph over all—beautiful women, strong men, soldiers, senators, emperors. Whatever seems, Death alone reigns."

What had changed since then, that everything was changed to her ?

There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

For many days this voiceless petition had been presented before the governor, remaining perplexed and uncertain within the walls of the city of Tiberias.

When Esther and Onias reached this multitude of their people, many faces already looked worn with watching.

Silently they took their places in the crowd.

Day after day the thousands assembled there remained, their numbers slowly increasing, and none departing.

It was an unusually sultry season even for that sultry hollow of the lake, with its tropical heat and fertility.

All day they were exposed to the sun, shining in his strength, from the first moment of his breaking like a giant from the screen of the eastern ridges, to the last when he disappeared behind the green mount of the Beatitudes.

The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

are a law unto themselves : which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."

But no perplexity had disturbed that loving heart with regard to her lost beloved. Christ the Lord had not begun to live at Bethlehem, nor to reign at Jerusalem. He had been living and reigning with the Father from the beginning. He was living and reigning now, over all things visible and invisible. That was enough.

All the heart's yearnings for justice and for pity were satisfied absolutely in the certainty that He was satisfied, and that He was Lord, everywhere,—from the beginning, world without end.

All barriers were broken down in Him, the Atoning Sacrifice, the Mediating Lord ; all barriers between man and man, between man and God, between earth and heaven.

No barriers of race could destroy the unity of the humanity He had deigned to take, not as a mutable vesture, but as another nature ; no barriers of past sin could divide the most guilty who believed in Him from God and from purity ; no impenetrable brazen gates of Hades could separate, really, the dead and the living ; since the seen and the unseen were alike His kingdom.

Where any wall of partition had stood, He stood, and said,—

" I am the Door."

Where the gates of exclusion stood, she saw Him stand,

To the senses, nothing. The sacred urn in that tomb still actually held what was dearest to her of all visible things. And it held only ashes.

To her spirit, everything. Death, to the senses, had conquered all; but Life, she knew, had conquered Death.

Not Cæsar, not any dark power of the under-world, not Death, was Universal Lord, but Christ; Christ, seen in the quiet morning on the shores by the lake—known in the quiet evening by the table, blessing the bread.

To Him all power was given in heaven and earth.

Lord everywhere and for ever. It was impossible to be exiled from His Dominion. Death only brought nearer Him, one stage nearer; from the Provinces to the Mother City, from the School to His Father's House.

That was all she had learned of the unseen world. But it was enough.

He was there, reigning there. There was no need of any other light to make that world bright but the light—awful, mystic, sweet, familiar—of His Presence, divine and human.

The words of the apostle to the Church at Rome had not yet been written:

“Glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law,

are a law unto themselves : which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."

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Once more, they thought, the God of their fathers had appeared for them.

Once more, as much His gift and sign of protection as if smitten from the rock, He had sent them the living waters from heaven.

Once more, Esther thought, "He had sent His rain on the just and the unjust, and caused His sun to shine on the evil and on the good."

With some anxiety as to the issue of this deliverance on Onias, she recommenced the homeward journey.

Would he regard this rescue as but another proof of prosperity being the sign from heaven, and be led once more to deny the Messiahship of Him whose life had ended, to the eyes of his nation, in defeat and death?

She need not have feared.

The cutting off of the right hand, which it had been to him to abandon all his treasures, and place himself as a beggar among the suppliant crowds of his people, had raised him to an altogether higher level. The single-hearted act had cleared the dim and troubled eyes. And he saw things as they are.

"Once more He has been patient and long-suffering with us," she said softly, as they mounted the slopes from the lake.

"Patient and long-suffering even with me, my beloved!" he replied. "I have found Him at last. All through those weary days and nights I heard a Voice saying, in the words you once told me He spoke to one

unknown world save that He is there ; and that, nevertheless, you are satisfied ? ”

“ It is true,” she said. “ I cannot find that He has told us absolutely anything but that He is there, that He will welcome each of us thither ; and that we shall be with Him there at once, without an interval. And we are satisfied.”

“ If what you believe is true,” Laon replied, “ think what He might have told you. For He must be as familiar with that world as with this. He must surely know how human hearts long for tidings of it. He might, for instance, have told you where they live. Would it not have been something to know that if you turn your eyes to some one spot in the heavens, you are looking towards the borders of their dwelling ? ”

“ It seems to us it would have been worth something,” she said.

“ Would it not have been worth something,” he continued, “ to know fully what they know of us ; to have a positive declaration to say they are with us—that they are watching over us, rejoicing when we overcome, caring for us ? ”

“ I believe they do,” she said. “ They are with Him who gave us to each other, and who cares for us infinitely more than any.”

“ You trust, you think, you infer,” Laon replied. “ But, if you are right, He *knew*. One positive word from His lips would have been worth much to you.”

she added, "no blow from His hand would be unwelcome. And who knows but they might even yet repent,—at Tiberias, as at Jerusalem? I know well that when He menaces, it is but a stronger form of entreaty to drive those who will not be won to Him."

The old man bowed his head on his breast.

"I, at least, have deserved any stroke from His hand," he murmured. And, after a pause, "We will go," he replied; and saying these words, he met her eyes with a look, straight and untroubled, such as she had not seen on his face for many a year.

He said not a word of the great sacrifices they might have to make. He had risen, for the time at least, to another level; and from it they looked, not great, but nothing.

Hastily they made arrangements for the journey. The next morning Esther was somewhat troubled to see him enter the treasure-chamber, from which he so often came with a care-worn, perplexed countenance. But this time, after some minutes, he came out of the door with a look of quiet determination, far more reassuring to her than the most radiant smile.

"I have only been labelling the pledged property: to be restored to the owners," he said, "if we do not come back again; perhaps some of it, if we do."

Once more also the old love for her had sprung up from beneath the load of care which had so long crushed it down. And it was with a heart lightened of its

are with Him, and are like Him ; that they must like to do what He delighted in ; and that they are able to do it, being strong as He is now—not in weakness of flesh, as He was and we are. Indeed, indeed we are content, Laon," she added : " and we have reason. Perhaps He told us all it was *possible* for us to know ; perhaps He told us all it was *good* for us to know. Which of the two we know not ; but one of the two we are sure it must be—knowing our hearts as He knows them, and being what He is. Meantime we are waiting for the opening of the door. Wonderful, happy secrets we know are there for us to learn ; for He is love, and not one dark secret, for in Him is no darkness at all. And while we wait we have always one way of learning more and more of them ; and that is by learning more and more of Him. Every fresh detail we can gather about Him—of His life here, His words, His dying, of His life now, is for us a fresh glimpse into their life. Every fresh revelation of His love and truth is a fresh revelation of their bliss. Every prayer to Him draws us near them. Every act of service to Him associates us with them. For they are with Him beyond the night ; and He is with us day and night. And indeed we are satisfied and glad. Have we not reason ? "

" I think you have reason, Clœlia Diodora, my God-given," he said, after a pause. " Many have been persuaded, you say, by His words ; I am convinced by His silence."

But this refuge did not suffice to shelter him long.

The storm drew nearer.

The decree went forth from Cæsar Caligula that a colossal statue of himself should be made, for the purpose of being enshrined in the Holy of Holies of the Temple at Jerusalem.

The rumour aroused the Syrian Jews not to rebellion, but to something deeper. The inmost heart of that old Hebrew patriotism, always more fervent and indestructible than any other, was touched. The whole nation was stirred with something of the spirit which moved the three children who chose the furnace rather than the idolatry.

Clothed in sackcloth, with ashes on their heads, they gathered in troops from all quarters around the Roman Governor, Petronius, at Ptolemais.

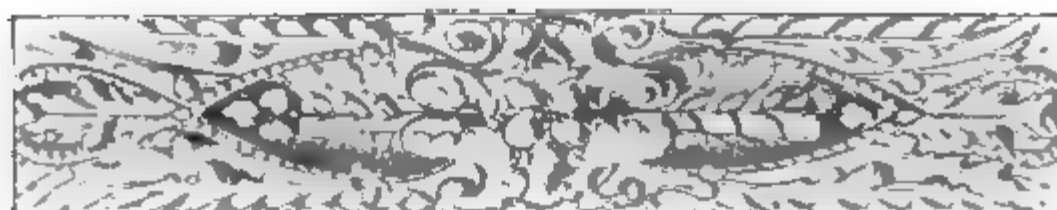
The command of the Emperor was unconditional. Two legions, usually stationed on the Euphrates, were, if necessary, to be concentrated on Judæa, to enforce the violation of the Jewish Temple. The resistance of the whole nation was not to be suffered to prevent it.

But Petronius dared to deliberate. Unlike that former Procurator of Judæa, whose fear of offending Cæsar had not saved him from banishment ere this to Gaul, to the people he presented a firm front, whilst in private he held a council and debated calmly how to avert the collision.

To the Jews gathered before him in mourning gar-

are with Him, and are like Him ; that they must like to do what He delighted in ; and that they are able to do it, being strong as He is now—not in weakness of flesh, as He was and we are. Indeed, indeed we are content, Laon," she added : "and we have reason. Perhaps He told us all it was *possible* for us to know ; perhaps He told us all it was *good* for us to know. Which of the two we know not ; but one of the two we are sure it must be—knowing our hearts as He knows them, and being what He is. Meantime we are waiting for the opening of the door. Wonderful, happy secrets we know are there for us to learn ; for He is love, and not one dark secret, for in Him is no darkness at all. And while we wait we have always one way of learning more and more of them ; and that is by learning more and more of Him. Every fresh detail we can gather about Him—of His life here, His words, His dying, of His life now, is for us a fresh glimpse into their life. Every fresh revelation of His love and truth is a fresh revelation of their bliss. Every prayer to Him draws us near them. Every act of service to Him associates us with them. For they are with Him beyond the night ; and He is with us day and night. And indeed we are satisfied and glad. Have we not reason ?"

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CHAPTER XLI.

UNITED in one brotherhood, the little company still retained their individual characters and aims ; or rather, their various ways of carrying out the one great purpose which is the aspiration of every Christian life. All barriers broken down, but no characteristics.

To Clœlia Diodora the words of the Vestal that morning in the garden on the Cœlian often came back. "Rejoice with me," she had said. "To-day I begin the sacred priesthood, the charge of the sacred fire. To-day my life flows forth from the shadow of the rock-arches to serve our Rome."

The whole Church seemed to Diodora as the fulfilment of that fair type ; a Vestal Priestess, clothed in the pure white stole, every morning drawing the living water from the Fountain for the Shrine, and day and night keeping the Sacred Fire burning, not only for Rome, but for the world. The whole redeemed Church on earth and in heaven, and every member of it.

Even to her a portion of the sacred charge was given :

the charge of Laon's little home, the brightening of his failing life, the bearing with his little irritabilities, the watching his every wish.

And in that corrupt and suffering City, so full of sins and wrongs and pain, there was no lack even for her of wider ministries. The whole work of the Church lay before her. Slavery was there; slavery, with its possibility of crucifixion, with its certainty of degradation. The Gladiatorial Games were there; and the Empire which provided them, and the People who delighted in them, were there. All these mountains of wrong had to be overthrown, and every one of them had to be overthrown by no earthquake, by no volcanic outburst, by no thunderbolts of divine vengeance, but from within, slowly and imperceptibly; by the living waters cleansing, and the sacred fire being enkindled in heart after heart.

Slowly, imperceptibly, yet by no quiet, inevitable diffusion of an atmosphere: by a revolution in heart after heart, wrought by a Power far mightier than any which convulsed the visible world; by unflinching loyalty, unconquerable courage, unquenchable love, by the willing sacrifice of life after life in ministrations of love, and in deaths of anguish.

Victory sure and steady, but always through the vanquished. Victory, not by the lightnings, but by the Cross.

To Callias, the Athenian sculptor, the difficulty of

an image of himself to be enshrined in the Temple of the Jews at Jerusalem; and the report that the whole nation are thronging round Petronius, the governor, declaring they will die rather than suffer it."

Esther said no more. With the certainty of peril to her people, her courage had returned.

She entered the house, pale indeed, but with no sign of agitation in voice or bearing.

Onias was there before her. She found him in the little inner chamber, crouching on the ground like a hunted animal, his hands clasped round his knees, and his face buried between them.

She knelt beside him, bowed her head as low as his, and touched his forehead.

"Onias, my husband," she said, "I know all. We will go together, and entreat for the children of our people. We will go to-morrow."

"*You* will go!" he exclaimed.

He had half hoped, half feared she would scarcely have heeded these tidings—would no longer identify herself with the nation who had committed what she regarded as such unequalled crime, and which now seemed to him falling under such unequalled vengeance.

"*We* will go!" she said, meeting his wavering eyes, until they began to enkindle with something of the light in hers. "This is work for women, for little children, for every creature of our name and blood. Women can at

the charge of Laon's little home, the brightening of his failing life, the bearing with his little irritabilities, the watching his every wish.

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Hastily they made arrangements for the journey. The next morning Esther was somewhat troubled to see him enter the treasure-chamber, from which he so often came with a care-worn, perplexed countenance. But this time, after some minutes, he came out of the door with a look of quiet determination, far more reassuring to her than the most radiant smile.

"I have only been labelling the pledged property: to be restored to the owners," he said, "if we do not come back again; perhaps some of it, if we do."

Once more also the old love for her had sprung up from beneath the load of care which had so long crushed it down. And it was with a heart lightened of its

ness of evil. Into the very shrines of the corrupt rites she entered in her vestal stole, and claimed there whatever was good, and beautiful, and true, as belonging to her Lord.

In the form of Orpheus, shepherding the sheep with his lyre, she saw the Shepherd of all the flocks of God in heaven and earth—beautiful, and true, and good; and fearlessly she delineated that symbol of Orpheus on her sacred sepulchres.

Too full of joy, and faith, and love was she in those first days to know fear. With no apologetic concessions, but with imperial claims to universal empire, she came forth into the world.

Whilst she dared the cross, and the wild beasts in the arena, and the pestilence, she dared fearlessly also the worse perils of moral pestilence, entering into every lazar-house to rescue thence whatever could be rescued.

Still, diseased and ghastly as the life was, heathenism was yet living, and it was not possible for the Christian sculptor to carve Apollos and Venuses for temples, where, in one sense, they were still worshipped. Nor was it possible for Apollos and Venuses to be received into Christian households as harmless decorations, fair relics of a religion passed away.

Christianity was a religion primarily in the sense of its being not an opinion, but a loyalty. And, perpetually, practical questions would arise which involved a decision between the pretender and the King.

There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

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When Esther and Onias reached this multitude of their people, many faces already looked worn with watching.

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The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

Him who had taken the little ones in His arms, and was Lord of life and death, nevertheless it could not banish the conviction that, in training them to be His disciples, she was training them for a service whose badge was the Cross, whose visible reward might be shame and torture such as He had borne.

There could be no levity in Christian life in those days.

The holy depth of the joy forbade it, and the weight of the glory to be revealed, but also the probability of the intervening suffering.



priests, or brought at last before another Roman governor less compassionate and just than Petronius, with no voice among the thousands He had helped and healed raised to plead for Him ?

Were there none who thought how the Holy City had been desecrated with a desecration beside which even this threatened pollution of the Sanctuary was but as a momentary accidental ceremonial defilement of some outmost court ?

Were there none who knew how the Son, the Beloved of God, had been rejected ; the Sanctuary of His sacred life desolated and desecrated, the very express Image of the Father dishonoured ?

To Esther it seemed as if her whole people stood now, silent and sentenced, before the Roman governor, in the place to which they had betrayed their King.

She knelt on the ground, and wondered and wept. Yet not altogether bitter or hopeless tears.

Could it be that her people were awaking, at last, and not even yet too late ?

The long-suffering they had wearied was so unconquerable ; the love they had despised so infinite ! And always, she thought, in that day of inhuman ingratitude, as in this day of heroic patriotism, then as now, now as then, these multitudes, with their blind anger and their blind trust, "know so little what they do."

"Father, forgive them."

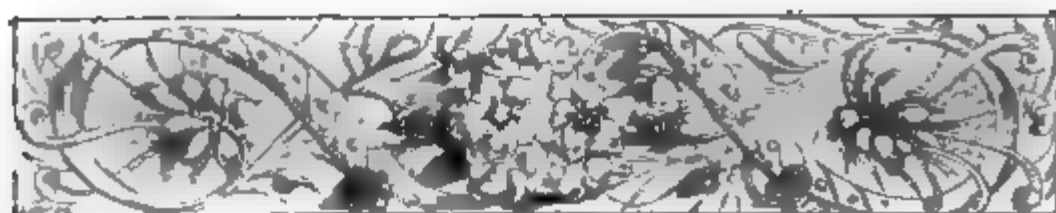
As she wept and prayed, the echo of the "Woe!"

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CHAPTER XLII.

WHEN the day's work was done, Siward might often be seen with his mother on the quays by the Tiber, at the schools of the masters of the gladiators, or among the slave-dealers, gleaning any information they could about captives or foreign slaves.

Through countless bands of downcast-looking men and women, brought from all quarters of the Empire to the great slave-market of Rome, Siguna's eyes had searched in vain for Olave.

Year after year she had traced, in thought, the changes time must have made in the form she saw last in the fulness of manly strength. Sometimes she said to herself that perhaps his countenance would be so changed and his frame so bowed, she might scarcely recognize him. But his voice she could never fail to know; his voice uttering her name.

Might not she also be so changed that even Olave might scan her features vacantly, finding no traces of old times there? She had watched herself change,

looking at herself as if with his eyes, and had seen the golden hair turn to gray, and the furrows deepen, and the eyes lose their lustre, and the cheeks their roundness and freshness,—and transferring the same slow work of time to the face she remembered so full of power and life, more and more, as the years went on, a fear grew on her that they might possibly meet and gaze vacantly on each other, and pass by, and so lose their one opportunity of reunion for ever.

But the voice, she felt sure, could never change so that she could fail to know it. Some tones, utterly indescribable to any besides, would reveal him to her. Above all, if it spoke her name. And with him, she was sure, it would be the same.

Patiently, therefore, she would pass through every company of German captives, softly reiterating his name.

So year after year had passed, but no responsive look or tone had come. Still she hoped on.

To every one else, even to Siward, the hope had come to seem a mere fond delusion. Yet he never failed to attend and guard her, and, as far as he could, to assist her in her search; and, so doing, to him other hopes and other work grew out of it.

Stories of wrong and sorrow were poured into his ear. From east and west and north and south the cry of the oppressed came to him. Sometimes with the fruit of his daily labour he could relieve the misery he saw so much of, sometimes even he had been able to pay a



CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONCE more on the way to Rome—to the centre of the world, to the source of Law and Government, of wonderful order, and of disorders, crimes and corruptions unutterable—with the Sacred Wood, the Tree of Life, in their keeping, to cast into the bitter fountains!

Not outwardly did the early Christians bear the symbol of the cross, not even on their sepulchres.

The power of it was on their hearts. The symbol was visibly before them too often, and too terribly complete; the symbol not of victory, but of the utmost humiliation and defeat a human life could reach, such as the guillotine and the gallows would but feebly represent to us.

Not in bronze and marble, and the pathos of religious sculpture; in its own unmitigated horror and ignominy, it met the eyes of the little Christian company as they returned from Syria to Rome.

Siward and his mother were once more slowly pacing, one spring evening, along the Appian Way, when once more, on the brow of an opposite hill, as before on their

Siguna persuaded Siward to start early in the morning and go a day's journey from the City, so as to be more secure of not missing any who might arrive.

Before evening they reached a hill-side beyond the undulating levels of the Campagna, which seemed to Siward familiar, as if he had visited it in a dream.

Siguna was wearied, and they sat down to rest a few moments before they climbed higher. As they rested they turned their faces towards Rome.

Before them stretched the arrowy lines of the Roman Road, scaling the hills and spanning the valleys.

Slowly, as they gazed, the day dissolved into dusk, the silvery glimpses of the sea between the opening of the hills vanished, the rolling surges of the Campagna grew dim and gray, the glossy bays and evergreen oaks around them were gathered into indistinguishable masses of shadow, until at last on earth nothing was discernible but those arrowy lines of road stretching into the darkness; and in heaven nothing save the green or golden seas which quivered between the purple bars of lower cloud, or the amber and ruby which jewelled the tips of the sun-lit clouds above. Suddenly the full recollection of the morning so long ago, when he had sat there with his mother, looking towards the unknown Rome, rushed on Siward's mind.

"The walls of Asgard!" he exclaimed. "Mother! since we were here last, we have found, we have entered, the gates of the City of God! Do you remember that

she added, "no blow from His hand would be unwelcome. And who knows but they might even yet repent,—at Tiberias, as at Jerusalem? I know well that when He menaces, it is but a stronger form of entreaty to drive those who will not be won to Him."

The old man bowed his head on his breast.

"I, at least, have deserved any stroke from His hand," he murmured. And, after a pause, "We will go," he replied; and saying these words, he met her eyes with a look, straight and untroubled, such as she had not seen on his face for many a year.

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died on such a cross as that ; and Death itself is slain ! Death itself has become the gate of the heavenly City, into which, unlike Asgard, Death can never come. More even than that : He Himself, the Crucified, has become the Door of the City of God, the City of the Immortal, the City of the Forgiven, to be entered here on earth, without a barrier stretching from earth up the heights of heaven, with gates on earth open night and day to man."

They did not journey further that night. Making a bed of dry leaves for his mother, and wrapping their mantles around her, he sat beside her, while she fell into a weary sleep.

But Siward could not sleep ; such thankfulness filled his heart, and such wide hopes of a life of service for his people.

Those arrowy lines of road, he thought, which had then seemed to him threads of the web to draw the prey to Rome, had become to him lines along which should glide the sunbeams of the good tidings. "And I," he thought, "perhaps even I, shall be one of the bearers of this light."

In the morning he went early, before his mother was awake, to see if he could buy a draught of milk from a goatherd whose flocks were scattered over the slopes.

At the next turn of the road he came on a band of captives, with a small Roman guard.

On a bank by the road-side, a little apart from the

There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

For many days this voiceless petition had been presented before the governor, remaining perplexed and uncertain within the walls of the city of Tiberias.

When Esther and Onias reached this multitude of their people, many faces already looked worn with watching.

Silently they took their places in the crowd.

Day after day the thousands assembled there remained, their numbers slowly increasing, and none departing.

It was an unusually sultry season even for that sultry hollow of the lake, with its tropical heat and fertility.

All day they were exposed to the sun, shining in his strength, from the first moment of his breaking like a giant from the screen of the eastern ridges, to the last when he disappeared behind the green mount of the Beatitudes.

The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

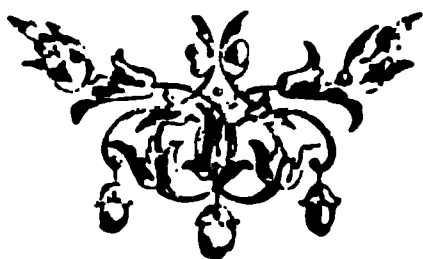
The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

With Siward there was no doubt and no hesitation as to the duty which had fallen on him.

In the slave-market, or at the Gladiatorial Games, one human chattel was as good as another; except for the work to be got out of either. In this case, the change of old age for vigorous manhood was sure to be accepted with alacrity.

No choice was left to Olave or Siguna. Siward had effected the transfer of himself for his father before they knew of it. And the chief of the band of captives declined afterwards to annul it at the old man's entreaties.

Once more, therefore, Siward trod those last weary miles of the Flaminian Way, a slave.





CHAPTER XLIII.

IT was the birth-day of the Emperor Claudius. Lamé, with a head that quivered with palsy, the aversion of his grandfather Augustus, the butt of the courtiers, despised by his own mother Antonia, Claudius, the brother of Germanicus, after fifty years' experience of the contempt with which that hard old world regarded bodily infirmity, had been dragged from the corner of the palace where he had crouched in terror after the assassination of Caligula, to the Empire of the World.

To his honour, those years of neglect and scorn do not seem to have embittered him. He indulged in no act of petty vengeance. He had no pleasure in seeing others suffer. The only indelible evil stamped on his character by those long years of contumely and impotence seems to have been an abject timidity, a destitution of self-reliance, which palsied his power for good, and left him the prey of wicked women and cringing courtiers.

But whether the Emperor delighted in them or not, the appetite of the Roman people for the Sanguinary

Games must be satisfied, and the Imperial birth-day must be celebrated by an especial slaughter.

For many years Claudius had been forbidden to appear on the Imperial Seat at the Circus or Amphitheatre, because his stunted and slightly palsied form was thought by the Imperial family to be a slur on the beauty and grace for which they were distinguished, a wounding of the majesty of Cæsar in the eyes of the people.

But to-day all this was changed. Claudius Cæsar was the divine dispenser of pleasures; his presence was to glorify the combat. The crowds streamed out of Rome to the Field of Mars, and filled range after range of the great Amphitheatre near the Tiber.

It was the First of August. The glare of the sun was overpowering. Many protected themselves from it by what others regarded as the Oriental effeminacy of umbrellas. But the show was to be magnificent, and it was worth enduring something to see thousands of slaves and criminals—and among them, hundreds of those German captives, who had been in training since May (stalwart men, most of them)—in deadly combat with each other and with hundreds of Numidian lions, panthers, and tigers. For after the Gladiatorial Fights, was to follow a grand combat with wild beasts.

The quays had been dangerous to walk on of late, with the disembarkation of the irritated and bewildered beasts. And now their unquiet moanings and roarings could be heard in the dens under the Amphitheatre,

Once more, they thought, the God of their fathers had appeared for them.

Once more, as much His gift and sign of protection as if smitten from the rock, He had sent them the living waters from heaven.

Once more, Esther thought, "He had sent His rain on the just and the unjust, and caused His sun to shine on the evil and on the good."

With some anxiety as to the issue of this deliverance on Onias, she recommenced the homeward journey.

Would he regard this rescue as but another proof of prosperity being the sign from heaven, and be led once more to deny the Messiahship of Him whose life had ended, to the eyes of his nation, in defeat and death?

She need not have feared.

The cutting off of the right hand, which it had been to him to abandon all his treasures, and place himself as a beggar among the suppliant crowds of his people, had raised him to an altogether higher level. The single-hearted act had cleared the dim and troubled eyes. And he saw things as they are.

"Once more He has been patient and long-suffering with us," she said softly, as they mounted the slopes from the lake.

"Patient and long-suffering even with me, my beloved!" he replied. "I have found Him at last. All through those weary days and nights I heard a Voice saying, in the words you once told me He spoke to one

They had all taken the terrible gladiator's oath, and probably taken it with little thought :

"We swear the oath, to be burned, vanquished, beaten, slain with the sword, and whatever else is commanded us, submitting ourselves to our Master as lawful gladiators, most religiously, body and soul."

To this Siward had added, in a clear voice, "With reserve of the rights of Him to whom I have vowed all this before."

He had gone diligently through all the training. He intended to sell his life dearly. He had hoped to do much with it. Life, dearly redeemed life, was precious to him. And he had much hope. Few frames more muscular or agile than his were among that desperate but well-trained band.

An assemblage of gladiators was no quiet place in which to prepare for what might be the last scene of life to him. Oaths and jests, and eager betting, and angry debating, with wild laughter, and fierce boasting among those who had already survived many such combats, made a din around him which drowned the roarings of the beasts, close at hand as they were.

He found it difficult to think or pray. Only, as often in moments of suspense or of strong excitement, one set of words kept beating through his brain, half mechanically, yet now and then striking on his heart with a vivid fulness of meaning :

"We swear, to be burned, vanquished, beaten, slain with

she added, "no blow from His hand would be unwelcome. And who knows but they might even yet repent,—at Tiberias, as at Jerusalem? I know well that when He menaces, it is but a stronger form of entreaty to drive those who will not be won to Him."

The old man bowed his head on his breast.

"I, at least, have deserved any stroke from His hand," he murmured. And, after a pause, "We will go," he replied; and saying these words, he met her eyes with a look, straight and untroubled, such as she had not seen on his face for many a year.

He said not a word of the great sacrifices they might have to make. He had risen, for the time at least, to another level; and from it they looked, not great, but nothing.

Hastily they made arrangements for the journey. The next morning Esther was somewhat troubled to see him enter the treasure-chamber, from which he so often came with a care-worn, perplexed countenance. But this time, after some minutes, he came out of the door with a look of quiet determination, far more reassuring to her than the most radiant smile.

"I have only been labelling the pledged property: to be restored to the owners," he said, "if we do not come back again; perhaps some of it, if we do."

Once more also the old love for her had sprung up from beneath the load of care which had so long crushed it down. And it was with a heart lightened of its

the other were driven in the raging troops of bewildered beasts ; bears, lions, panthers, and among them a few peaceable giants of elephants—to be irritated and maddened into one indistinguishable tangle of rage and pain and slaughter.

For an instant the crowd of eager, expectant faces in the seats of the Amphitheatre flashed on Siward, as the troop of combatants passed before the Emperor with the "*Ave Cæsar, morituri te saluant.*"

For one calm, conscious moment he lifted up his heart. "*Ave Christe, Domine !* living or dying we worship Thee." And afterwards, in the words of the fatal oath, "*To Thee, Master, body and soul, to Thee !*"

Then the rush of the combat began.

And thenceforth he was conscious of nothing but the straining of every nerve and muscle in the conflict for life, until, torn and bleeding, after the last death-grapple, he saw a powerful panther rolling in the dust before him, and heard a shout of applause ringing from all sides of the crowded Amphitheatre. Then all sights and sounds faded into shadows and into dim echoes, far away, and nothing remained clear but "*To Thee, Master, body and soul, to Thee !*".

* * * * *

He woke, not to the welcomes which never die into farewells, but once more to the wistful tenderness of his mother's eyes ; not to the immortal vigour of the life beyond death, but to the mortal weakness of a frame

which could never again be as it had been, the able servant of the spirit.

Very slowly, by the tenderest nursing, he recovered, but maimed and weakened hopelessly.

At first it seemed very hard to be thus beaten back, a helpless wreck, on the shore he seemed to have left for ever; to come back thus to the old work without the old power.

He had longed and prayed and striven hard for life. The Kingdom of God had such glorious conquests to make still on earth, and here on earth he had felt he might aid in them. Not by passive endurance and by feminine patience only, and by martyrdom, but by daring enterprise, and by the highest continuous strain of the energy of the bravest men, were the first conquests of Christianity achieved. Above, also, in the higher world, he knew he might aid in that highest service, although he knew not how; but he would have wished to have done a little more towards winning the "Well done" before he saw the Master. He had taken the oath to suffer and to die; he had not thought it could rather mean to live and suffer. Life being yielded up, he had thought of no other alternative but that other life beyond, the inconceivable joy of seeing the Master's face, and being for ever with Him.

To die to the work of earth and yet not to enter on that heavenly life, this was what he had never dreamed would be laid on him.

This, therefore, was his Cross.

The only thing that made the thought endurable to him at first was the welcome in his mother's eyes.

For her sake he felt it was well.

"Thank God!" she said to him one day, when his strength began to return. "Do you remember the man of God in Esther's book who took his only son up the hill to sacrifice him, and raised the knife to slay him? If thou hadst died, my son, all my life would have been just that. Day after day I should have been toiling up the hill to the altar of sacrifice, lifting up my hand to slay thee."

He was content to spare her that anguish, although to him it seemed that the burden had but been transferred. All his life, he thought, he would be toiling up the weary way bearing the wood of the sacrifice, and having no strength left to bear anything more.

But he was content. The Master had said it was a Cross his disciples should bear after Him. That must mean about the hardest thing any one could bear. Exactly this had been laid on him. It was no more than he had willingly undertaken in his Sacramental promise, when, rising from the cold tide of the Orontes into the glory of the Syrian dawn, baptized into Christ, he had come forth into a new world, and a new life, vowed, as he was altogether redeemed by Him, to be altogether His—His soldier and servant—to suffer, serve, or die; to be subject to Him body and soul for ever.

It was all the harder because the life he had rescued by his own seemed so little likely to be a substitute for his, and so doubtful a blessing to its possessor.

Very seldom, at first, the old man Olave came into the sick-chamber; and when for a few moments he came and stood beside his son, he would scarcely speak a word, but stand helpless and silent, with a look of bewilderment and pain in his face—more like the perplexed wistful gaze of a faithful dog than that of human eyes—until Siguna would gently take his hand, and, dumb and unresisting, he would submit to be led away.

By degrees, however, he consented to watch by the couch, seeming quite pleased, like a child, to be allowed to be of use. He would sit quite silent, and mechanically brush away the flies that buzz about all defenceless creatures.

And as he sat there, Siward grew conscious of the world of civilization that had been slowly growing and deepening between him and the old barbarian life.

To what must the old man's thoughts be wandering back, as his eyes were fixed on that sad, far-away gaze? To the old forest-life, the chase, the forge, the battle; to the carouse, with its talk of the chase, and the forge, and the battle; to the early married life, when his boys and girls were growing up around him to the recurrence of just such a life as his own, as surely as the acorn into the oak, the nestlings of this season to be the songsters of the next. To old Olave the City was

a mere prison, a mere labyrinthine barrier between him and freedom.

The mythologies and philosophies, with their aspirations, and their chasms of darkness, which had been evolved from the fertilizing contact of nation with nation, and men with men, and which both by their light and their darkness had prepared the world for Him in whom all practical problems were solved, and all theoretical perplexities hushed to acquiescent expectation,—to old Olave the smith all these things would be but as the language of another world.

Philosophy was to him known but in its barest practical conclusions; such as “to endure what could not be cured.” History limited itself to the narratives of the feuds between the Chatti, Cherusci, and Chauci,—with a dim background of mythological heroes in the far East, which constituted also his theology.

And yet beneath those dumb aged lips flowed the fountain from which all the mythologies and philosophies had sprung,—the rejoicing, sorrowing, struggling, yearning human heart.

To him, also, God was the only Source of life. Before him also was Death, and the Life unknown.

And Siward felt not a doubt that in the redeeming life and death of the Son of God, Lord of all men, lay what would meet his father's sorrows and wants, dim and speechless as they were, as well as those which had learned better to name themselves.

What then was to unseal that dumb heart to Him?

He had yet to learn the universal and irresistible potency of that worthy Name by which he was named.

"Father," he said one day, as they sat alone in a little inner court, to which, for the first time, he had gathered strength to walk, "this City is a prison to you. I used to feel it so. We will go back together to the forests."

The old man made no reply for some time. His face worked painfully, and at last he exclaimed abruptly, "The whole world is a prison to me! Siward, boy, my son! you had no right to keep me here against my will, no right to prevent my dying as a warrior, to make me live on as a sick woman. To me it would have been nothing to fall there among their beasts. I should never have risen again. It was a great wrong to give me no choice; to keep me chained to this miserable old age, to see thee suffer thus."

"Father!" Siward said, "I had no choice. No more than thou hadst. I have learned to know the Father in the heavens, thine and mine; I had to obey Him. I have sworn allegiance to the Lord who redeemed us, who reigns there; to whom we belong, thou and I. Thou didst not know Him. Painful or pleasant, to thee or to me, it was for me to go to Him I serve, and for thee to stay and learn of Him. I did but what I had to do. He called, and I could but obey."

For the first time, the seal seemed broken ; the bewildered look changed into an air of questioning on the old man's face.

And, simple as a little child, the old man sat and learned the truth which the little child can learn, and received the faith which "enters in at lowly doors," because it is no elaborate machinery of religious opinion, but the revelation of relationships, and the record of facts, the Story of a Life and Death—of a life that dieth nevermore, and of a love that never fails.

And as he listened and learned, the mysteries of our common human life grew clear to him ; the rents and fissures of the heart, torn and convulsed by the changes of seventy years, were filled with the living waters, every rent and fissure but deepening its capacity to receive ; and the murmurs of the infinite sea, by whose shore we are all standing, to which he had listened, wondering, so long, not knowing what they meant, or whence they came, were changed into music, echoing the harps of God on the other shore.

Gradually Siward endeavoured to accustom himself to his cramped and narrowed life.

Often he would watch Clœlia Diodora, and think how his heart had warmed of old into a glow of compassion for her and other sufferers, and how little he had comprehended what it was actually to suffer, to take the bitter cup of deprivation and pain into one's own hands ;

not merely to try to make it tolerable to others, but really to drink it oneself.

The Cross gained for him ever deeper significance. Not only to save His own from suffering, but to enable them to suffer, and, by suffering, to grow pure and strong, lowly and loving, like Himself, had He suffered. Not as an imperial largess, from the throne of the universe, which was His, had he shed pity on the world, not from the joyous overflowings of an unbroken heart, but from the depths of a heart broken for man, broken by man, the fountain of divine compassion flowed.

So, slowly, he learned to bow beneath the Master's yoke ; and, bowing, found it grow good and kindly—not a fetter to hinder from serving, not a burden to encumber, but the “yoke” binding to the service appointed him ; the service which was, therefore, for him, the highest and the best.

And having submitted, he had learned his lesson ; he had done his work, and from him the yoke was taken off.

The apparent recovery of the spent strength did not continue.

The heat of the Roman summer, and the stagnant air of the close city dwellings, finished in the strong northern frame the work which the fury of the wild beasts had begun.

There was little speech about what he slowly grew to hope, and those who watched him to fear. There was no perfect finishing, no sweet, melodious close of life.

Imperfect, unfinished, fragmentary, it ceased to be seen.

With countless explanatory words unspoken, and high hopes unfulfilled, and high purposes not even uttered.

Not as a tale that is told: incomplete, unexplained, inexplicable as the first pages of a tale that is not told. The last legible page rising to no climax, rounded off to no *Finis*, not the chapter, not the sentence even finished.

Incomplete, because immortal. Unfinished, because scarcely even begun. Passing imperceptibly and quietly into the next stage of life, as childhood into youth, or youth into manhood.

Without a break, to him, to the deathless redeemed spirit commending itself with child-like trust into the hands of his Father!

But for those he left below, who belonged not yet to the life beyond the everlasting gates, to whom seeing them, therefore, from this side, they seemed often not the shadows they are, but sometimes the only realities, in a world of shadows, many things remained to do, many lessons to learn, many sacrifices to accomplish.

The meaning and quiet beauty of the life they had ceased to have among them began to unfold before them.

He had said so little, how was it that he had been so much to all?

“Ah!” old Laon said, “we, the talkers, shall pass away and leave no such solemn blank as this. Other floods of speech will flow on and drown ours in forgetfulness, whilst those silent lives echo on and on. Speech is for the present. Deeds are for all time. They never die; but live on in the hearts of men, in the hearts out of which are the issues, ever fresh, of fresh life.”

“I thought,” he said, at another time, “I was teaching him, as I told him all the wise things I knew, while he worked steadily on at the old workshop in the Suburra, now and then asking some child-like question, or, in dim and struggling words, trying to make me understand the old legends of his people. But all the while he was teaching me.”

“How was it,” Laon said again, one day, “that he never seemed doing anything wonderful; and yet, when he sacrificed his life, like one of the heroes of old, no one thought it anything wonderful for him to do? We have had a hero with us, and we did not know it. Oh, why did we not know it?”

“I knew it!” his mother said softly, but with a triumphant light in her eyes. “I knew it always.”

And Clœlia Diodora felt that she also had known it. From the moment when he had saved her from the trampling of the crowd, by placing her so gently on the

steps of the temple, to her all manly heroism had been enshrined in his form, as all womanly heroism in that of her sister, the Vestal. To her he seemed not further off, but rather nearer, now that one veil of flesh was rent between them for ever. And she could not help feeling a kind of keen joy in the pain which, while it impoverished this poor transitory world below, enriched the world above, where those she loved best abode, with another victorious spirit who had well fought his fight.

But Hilda wept over her brother, and would not be comforted. "She had thought the Master would have come back for them all, together. She had thought He would have been here, and her brother would not have died."

But Diodora said, "I would not have our dearest escape what our Lord underwent for us. I would not miss, or have them miss, one step of the dark way He trod. What are chariots of fire or legions of angels to the glory of treading in His footsteps! To all eternity I think it will be sweet to have drunk of His cup and to have been baptized with His baptism. For ever and for ever, I think it will be good to have died, as our Lord died."

Callias found a solace in lavishing all the skill he had in making the rocky sepulchre in the Catacombs, where Siward was laid, as beautiful as he could, with symbolic painting. In the presence of that through which so lately that strong and gentle spirit, so unconscious of its beauty,

There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

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The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

Yet not in the sepulchre or the darkness,—in the daylight, where work could be done, would they hold the truest communion with those who had gone before. In the world where slavery and the Gladiatorial Games still had their constant victims; in the world of the oppressed, of the wronged, of outcast babes, of lives lost in ways unutterably worse than death—where as yet there was no hospital for the sick, no refuge for the poor; in the world of blacker evil still, the world, not of the oppressed, but of the oppressors, of those who not merely suffered, but did the will of the great oppressor of man,—those who enslaved the slaves, and cast out their own babes to perish, and delighted in the dying agonies of the Amphitheatre;—yet nevertheless the world which Christ the Lord had loved, and had redeemed, and where He was always working with His own for man—there would they be nearest those who, absent from the body, now were present with the Lord. There they would be working with Him and with them, in one Kingdom, in one Family, in one Service.

“To them,” as their contemporaries said, “every strange land was as their native country, and every native country was as a foreign land.”

“Not the world where our beloved dwell with Christ is the under-world; but this!” Clœlia Diodora loved to think. “Not this can be the Home, but what He who knew it called His Father’s House.”

“Not we, but they it is who are awake; who are the

priests, or brought at last before another Roman governor less compassionate and just than Petronius, with no voice among the thousands He had helped and healed raised to plead for Him ?

Were there none who thought how the Holy City had been desecrated with a desecration beside which even this threatened pollution of the Sanctuary was but as a momentary accidental ceremonial defilement of some outmost court ?

Were there none who knew how the Son, the Beloved of God, had been rejected ; the Sanctuary of His sacred life desolated and desecrated, the very express Image of the Father dishonoured ?

To Esther it seemed as if her whole people stood now, silent and sentenced, before the Roman governor, in the place to which they had betrayed their King.

She knelt on the ground, and wondered and wept. Yet not altogether bitter or hopeless tears.

Could it be that her people were awaking, at last, and not even yet too late ?

The long-suffering they had wearied was so unconquerable ; the love they had despised so infinite ! And always, she thought, in that day of inhuman ingratitude, as in this day of heroic patriotism, then as now, now as then, these multitudes, with their blind anger and their blind trust, " know so little what they do."

" Father, forgive them."

As she wept and prayed, the echo of the " Woe !"

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The cutting off of the right hand, which it had been to him to abandon all his treasures, and place himself as a beggar among the suppliant crowds of his people, had raised him to an altogether higher level. The single-hearted act had cleared the dim and troubled eyes. And he saw things as they are.

"Once more He has been patient and long-suffering with us," she said softly, as they mounted the slopes from the lake.

"Patient and long-suffering even with me, my beloved!" he replied. "I have found Him at last. All through those weary days and nights I heard a Voice saying, in the words you once told me He spoke to one

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There was no wailing or clamour. The only eloquence they attempted was that of silence.

They would not go to their houses or their fields, they would not till nor sow the ground, nor seek the shelter of a roof, until they were assured that the Temple of their God should not be desecrated.

For many days this voiceless petition had been presented before the governor, remaining perplexed and uncertain within the walls of the city of Tiberias.

When Esther and Onias reached this multitude of their people, many faces already looked worn with watching.

Silently they took their places in the crowd.

Day after day the thousands assembled there remained, their numbers slowly increasing, and none departing.

It was an unusually sultry season even for that sultry hollow of the lake, with its tropical heat and fertility.

All day they were exposed to the sun, shining in his strength, from the first moment of his breaking like a giant from the screen of the eastern ridges, to the last when he disappeared behind the green mount of the Beatitudes.

The night scarcely began to cool the air or the hot earth, ere the dawn began to burn again across the lake.

The only changes in the weary, anxious watching were when the rulers came back with reports of failure from the presence of the governor.

He had but to obey, he said. The statue was already in the hands of Sidonian carvers at Ptolemais. Day by day, whilst they waited there, the shapeless marble was growing into the image of Cæsar. Would they fight against their Emperor?

The rulers replied they had no thought of war; but they would be massacred rather than break their law.

And prostrate on the ground, with expressive Oriental gestures, they offered their necks to the sword. The soldiers might slay them, unresisting, one by one. The power of Rome was invincible. But no power on earth could compel them to live, and see the Temple of the Lord made the Temple of an idol.

For forty days this silent pleading continued.

Strange and awful days and nights to Esther. Did none beside herself in that suppliant crowd see any strange significance, any strange contrast in all this?

Were there none there who had felt the healing touches, heard the matchless teaching? Were there none who had listened to the Beatitudes? Were there none who had listened to the Woes?—"Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida."

To her the whole silence seemed full of that Woe; so entreating, so reluctant, so sure.

Were there none who thought of that night and morning of silent endurance, of the gracious Divine Sufferer buffeted to and fro among Roman soldiers and Jewish

